

JOEY AND CO. IN TIROL

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

Author of

THE CHALET SERIES

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JOEY AND CO. IN TIROL

By

ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER

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For
MARGOT ROSSER
with best love from
Elinor M. Brent-Dyer

Chapter I

THE EFFECT OF A BAD SON

"The long and the short of it is you've been overdoing it ever since you came to live in Switzerland. You've just gone at everything in your usual headlong fashion regardless of everything else. *No* one can go on doing that sort of thing indefinitely. Now see where it's landed you!"

Lady Russell stopped for breath at this point and eyed her younger sister severely, with one hand held up to enforce silence until she had finished. Joey Maynard, who had been lying back on her pillows, regarding her sister with an expression of awed admiration—Madge Russell had been holding forth for the last ten minutes and this was the first time she had stopped—paid not the slightest attention to the uplifted hand. She raised herself to turn and stare at the windows down which the rain was streaming so heavily that it was impossible to see out.

"O.K.," she said, hugging her knees and burying her chin on them. "I'm in bed—and very nice, too, considering the weather." She smirked complacently and went on, "All revved up, aren't you? Bless my soul! Can't a poor body do a neat little swoon if she likes without you coming over all elder-sisterly, not to say positively *school-marmish*? To hear you talk, anyone would think I was at my last gasp!"

Madge Russell refused to be deflected from her course. "You stop being cheeky and listen to me. This sort of thing has got to *end*!"

"Said she with a snort!" Joey put in, chuckling maddeningly. "Keep your wool on! I'll bet you'd have fainted yourself if you'd seen one of your beloved sons gyrating halfway down a precipice, unable to come or go and not a soul on hand to help except you and the girls, since Steve and Charles had fled to find rescuers. *And* I had all five babies with me to complicate matters! I only wonder you didn't arrive here to find me a raving lunatic and Jack hunting wildly for straws for me to stick in my hair! I call a mere swoon after a doing of the kind I had, a trifle of trifles. What you and Jack and Jem are all prancing about like this for, I *don't* know! I'm quite all right again. I only stayed in bed first, because you all put up your noses and howled at me; second, because it's such a filthy day, bed's the best place, anyhow. Now pipe down a little and stop doing the good and anxious eldest sister, for it doesn't—it really *doesn't*—cut any ice with me."

"You ungrateful creature!" Madge cried. "And to think I dropped everything and flew here by the first plane available to be treated to *this* sort of thing!"

"That was none of *my* doing."

"No; it was Jack's."

"Well, there you are. Anyway, we're off to the Tiernsee next week and believe me, I mean to have a really good holiday once we're settled down."

"Quite right—you *are*!"

Madge said this with such meaning that Joey, who had lain back again, reared up to demand, "And what, may I ask, are you folk cooking up for me?"

"Only what looks like being essential. I can just *see* you having a really good holiday with all your eleven tagging after you the whole time!"

"Talk sense! The girls"—she referred to her triplet daughters who were the eldest of her long family—"certainly don't do any tagging after me these days. And it's on the early side for Geoff and Phil, as I hope you'll agree. It isn't *usual* for babies of eight weeks or so to tag after anyone——"

"Talk sense, indeed!" Madge's patience suddenly gave way and she blew up. "I think it's you who need to talk sense!"

Joey grinned at her. "Keep calm—keep calm, my lamb! However, to relieve your mind, let me tell you that far from running round after me, the girls are most helpful with the small fry. That's the beauty of a long family. The older ones help with the younger. You know, yourself, that Steve can generally keep Charles and Mike in order and Felix admires his eldest brother so much that he's no trouble to anyone so long as Steve will take charge of him."

"Steve couldn't keep Mike from going over that cliff after a bird's nest," her sister pointed out.

"My dear girl, that happened before he could say anything. Mike was halfway down before Steve knew anything about it. The other two had only turned their backs half a minute earlier when Mike went mad. I wish the little pest had never started that confounded birds' eggs collection of his! It was seeing the raven's nest that set him off and I have to confess that Mike has inherited one thing from me, at any rate—a trick of going bald-headed for anything without stopping to think. I know well enough how many of the scrapes I got into in my salad days came from just that and nothing else. I am only thankful that Steve kept his head enough not to go after Mike and to stop Chas when he proposed doing it. A nice thing it would have been if we'd had to rescue all three boys from that precipice!"

"Oh, I'll grant you your eldest four are growing into a really helpful gang. All the same, it still leaves Mike and the twins and Cecil; and Mike is one person's work!"

"He'll be as good as gold for weeks to come after this. Anyhow, I'm taking both Anna and Rösli with me, so I shall have help the whole time."

"And very nice, too. But I may as well inform you that *when* you go off to the Tiernsee, you won't have all your eleven with you."

"Not have all my eleven with me? What do you mean? Where else do you think they'll be?"

"Stop glaring at me like that and try to listen to me quietly and I'll explain."

"I should think you will!" But Joey lay back against her pillows and ceased to glower.

"*That's* better! Now let me tell you all this quietly, Jo, and then you'll see what we're all driving at—and I mean *all*."

"You just get busy about it. I suppose," Joey added bitterly, "that you and Jack and Jem have put your heads together and cooked up some ghastly plan and I'll have no peace until I agree to it."

"Well, I hope you will agree, but honestly, it isn't ghastly—only common sense. Come, Joey! You've given the entire family a nasty shock by that very lengthy faint of yours. You can't expect any of us to regard nearly two hours of unconsciousness when *nothing* seemed to avail to bring you round as anything but serious. Your girls were nearly frantic and Jack was worse. When he found what had caused it, if Mike had been anywhere within reach, his father would have nearly skinned him alive, from what Len tells me. Mercifully, she had kept her head and she sent Mike and all the small fry off to Hilary Graves in charge of Margot and Con with a request that Hilary would keep them until they were sent for. I must say, Joey, that eldest girl of yours is a boon and a blessing. But lie down comfortably and I'll tell you our

plans. And you may as well take it calmly, if only for Mike's own sake. Jack's still not very far from thinking that hanging's too good for him. It'll be just as well to keep the pair of them well apart for the next two or three weeks and give that husband of yours a chance to simmer down."

"Huh!" was all Joey vouchsafed in reply, but she held her tongue otherwise and Madge continued to lay before her the plans which she, her husband and Joey's own husband, Jack Maynard, had concocted the previous evening.

"You really do look all in, Jo—all eyes and white as a sheet. Little wonder when one considers the time you've had this year. All that bother, including the scarlet fever worry in the Easter term *and* that horrible accident of Naomi Elton's. I know *that* has proved a blessing in disguise and there's every reason to hope now that in time Naomi will be as straight—or almost as straight as anyone else, quite apart from the fact that it's stopped the rot where her character was concerned."

"If that's what you think, my love, you're behind the times. It was Mary-Lou who did that."

"Was it? I thought it was the result of learning that even if ballet dancing was out of the question for her at this late date, at least it was going to be possible to overcome a good deal of her deformity, and enable her to be normal."

"That's helped, no doubt; but in the first place it was Mary-Lou and Mary-Lou alone. I got so much from Vi Lucy and Verity Carey."

"If," said Madge with sudden gravity, "the worst happens where Roland Carey is concerned, at least Doris will have Mary-Lou to comfort her, as well as his girl, Verity."

"What do you mean?"

"The old wound has flared up again and Doris and the girls are taking him to Glasgow for MacKenzie to see him again. You know what he said last time. If it should come to amputation, well, Roland is much frailer than he was last time. Jem says he doubts if he can come through."

"Oh, Madge! Poor Doris!—and poor Mary-Lou, too, for if Doris is left alone, it'll probably mean that Mary-Lou must give up her wish for archaeology as a career and she's stuck to it that that's what she wants to do for years, now."

"I hadn't thought of the effect on Mary-Lou; but you're right, I'm afraid. She won't leave her mother alone—that's certain. And though Verity is a dear girl, she's a broken reed when it comes to support. She'll need support herself. Oh lets hope it won't come to that, for everyone's sake!"

"There's one thing," Joey said, sitting up. "Mary-Lou is fine enough not to let it spoil her life. If she can't have what she wants most, she'll look about for the next best thing and go all out for it. But it is hard lines if that happens."

"Yes; it is. Well, we can only pray for them all. At least I think we can be sure that Mary-Lou who has done so much to help other people will face things bravely and finely, whatever happens."

Her face was very troubled and Joey, after eyeing her for a moment or two, deliberately turned the conversation back to her own affairs.

"As you say, we can only pray for them. And now, go on with your plans. I'm promising nothing until I've heard the last detail and taken time to consider."

"There's nothing for you to consider. All you have to do is to fall in with our ideas," Madge said firmly. "Well, your new twins arrived on top of everything else just eight weeks

ago. Mike's exploit has just rounded things off. Jem tried to get Jack to see all this last night, but Jack wasn't having any. He's furious with Mike and looks like staying so for some time to come."

Joey nodded. "I know. He's one of the sweetest-tempered men you could find anywhere as a rule. When he *does* lose his temper, it's a case of look out for explosions for quite a while. I quite see that, all things considered, it'll be as well to keep him and Mike apart for the next two or three weeks until, as you say, he's had a chance to simmer down. He certainly won't forgive that young man straight off the reel. At the same time, I can see no reason for including the twins and Cecil in this banishment edict."

"Only because you don't choose to. I know the girls will help, but if you have those three around, as well as the new twins, you'll worry about them at intervals. The idea is that, as far as possible, sources of worry are to be removed from you. Steve and Chas are very little trouble and Geoff and Phil seem to be all one could ask of babies, sturdy, making steady progress and, thank goodness, some time away from teething troubles as yet. We've decided that the four Juniors can come to me. Rosa will be delighted to have a little girl to look after again and Mike will behave himself, as you say. He's had a doing, you know. Len has kept him well away from Jack these last three days and in any case, no one has felt very loving towards him. He's been more or less sent to Coventry and Anna has given him his meals with the nursery folk. It hasn't been a happy three days for him. But as Jack refused to thrash him—said he didn't dare just then—or have anything to do with him, there was no other way of punishing him."

"Yes?" Joey's voice was noncommittal.

"My dear girl, you know how insistent your husband has always been on obedience to rules and Mike deliberately broke rules when he went over that cliff."

"I only wonder you have the nerve to take the kid on after all this!"

"I've had plenty of practice! You were a stormy petrel in your own youth, remember. And my own family haven't been little angels by any manner of means."

"How long are you proposing to keep him?"

"Till the end of the holidays. He can go back to school from us."

"Oh, can he, indeed?" Joey's face was flushed and her eyes were sparkling. "Well, I'm telling you here and now that he can't! I'll agree to parting with him for three or four weeks to let Jack get over his rage. But he's our child and he's coming back to us by the end of the month at latest. However bad he may have been, I'll never agree to banishment to that extent! So put *that* on your needles and knit it!"

"Joey——"

"No—and *no*!" Joey stuck out her jaw. "The poor kid would think he was in disgrace the whole time and I won't have him made as miserable as all that comes to. I agree that he ought to be punished for disobedience. Why on earth someone didn't give him a sound whipping at the time, I can't think. If Jack wouldn't or couldn't, where was Jem? He's the boy's uncle and the fit person to do it in the circumstances. But you'll never get me to agree to a thing like this. Mike's our boy and he's going to realise that however bad he may be, we still love him and will go on loving him. I hate these punishments that drag on and on, anyhow. I believe that such treatment is far more likely to harden him than do him good."

Madge was betrayed into saying something she had meant to keep to herself. "I don't think you need be afraid of that. Mike saw you keel over, you know and he's had such a fright,

that he's been broken-hearted ever since. Len was up with him for a good two hours last night—I heard their voices and went to see what was wrong——”

“And then you want me to go on punishing him? I *never* will!” Joey tossed back the bedclothes and scrambled out of bed. “Where's my dressing-gown?”

“Joey! What are you going to do?”

“Seek Mike and forgive him—fully and freely. He shan't have another moment's misery that I can help!”

“Well, you can't—he's out with Anna and the babies. Come back to bed, Joey!”

“No! I'm going to dress and be ready for him when he comes back. My poor little man! At least he shall know that Mother will always forgive him and love him! And I'll talk to Jack the first moment I see him.”

“You'll come back to bed at once and stop talking so wildly! If nothing else will serve you, I'll send him to you as soon as he comes in. I'll talk to Jack myself, and I'll tell the rest that they're to take him back into their midst. But you're coming back to bed at once, Joey!”

Since by this time, she was feeling very weak and swimmy, Joey yielded sufficiently to return to bed, but Madge had to give her solemn promise that she would do all she had said and when bedtime came, a deeply repentant Mike was visited by his father who forgave him fully after he had talked to him very seriously about disobedience and heedlessness. The plans stood. The four second youngest of the family were to be carried off by Auntie Madge when she finally returned home to England, but it was understood that this was only till the end of the month. Then they would all return to spend a week at the holiday home by the Tiernsee before coming back to the Maynard home on the Görnetz Platz to prepare for school.

Once she had made sure of this, Joey consented to take life easily for the next day or two and the long Maynard family became its happy, united self again. Then news came from England which turned all their thoughts in quite another direction. Madge's twin brother, Dick Bettany, wrote to say that his eldest girl, Peggy, who had been named Margaret Josephine after both her aunts, had become engaged to one Lieutenant Giles Winterton, brother of two of the Chalet School girls, and was to be married early in October. Peggy wanted her triplet cousins as well as her Aunt Madge's three girls and her own sisters for bridesmaids. As her home for the next few years would be in the West Indies, since her future husband was in the Atlantic fleet, everyone was determined to turn up for the wedding and in the general excitement, Mike's iniquities were lost sight of. But that young man had learned a lesson he never forgot and the four weeks spent at his Aunt Madge's home in the Welsh Mountains passed with unusual peace where he was concerned.

Chapter II

THE THREE R'S

Len Maynard stood at the open front door of Die Blumen. Many years ago, before Joey Bettany and Jack Maynard had even been engaged, much less married, it had been the Russells' summer house. Before that, it had housed and, indeed, been built for a boarding school named after the saint of the village at the end of the lake, St. Scholastika. As a school, it had not prospered and when the Head became possessed of a comfortable private income, she had offered the place lock, stock and barrel to the authorities of the Chalet School. The Russells had agreed and, since the building was not required for its original purpose any longer as the girls naturally went to the Chalet School buildings at the opposite side of the lake, they had occupied it themselves during the summer months.

At the time of the Anschluss, when Hitler and his armies marched into Austria both school and the big Sanatorium on the Sonnalpe behind the house had had to be given up.^[1] In fact, Joey herself and a number of the others, including Jack Maynard, Miss Wilson, one of the Heads of the Chalet School, and another of the young doctors at the Sanatorium, had had to flee by devious ways into Switzerland and the connection between the two establishments and the Tiernsee had been severed for many years. Then, when the school had celebrated its coming-of-age the previous summer, it had been decided that one way of celebration should be bringing the present pupils of the school in batches to spend a weekend at the lake so that they might see and love the place where their school had begun. Joey herself had come with the prefects and so greatly had old associations worked in her, that she had moved heaven and earth to find however small a foothold in the place she had always loved.^[2]

[1] The Chalet School in Exile.

[2] The Chalet School Comes of Age.

At first, it had seemed impossible. Then, just when she was ready to give up in despair for that year, at any rate, a lucky meeting had brought her St. Scholastika, or Die Blumen as it had been renamed. Three weeks of the last summer holidays had been spent there, mostly occupied in setting the place to rights. Expeditions had proved to be almost out of the question, for the weather had turned nasty the day after the Maynards' arrival and never cleared up until two days before they returned to their Swiss home on the Görnetz Platz. Thus, none of the younger members of the family had had a chance to know much about the place where their mother's girlhood had been spent so happily.

"But if it only stays like *this*," Len thought as she gazed round, sniffing the scented air joyfully, "we ought to know quite a lot about it before we leave this year."

As it turned out, none of Joey's sons except tiny Geoffrey was with them. An old friend living outside Montreux had happened to hear of Mike's exploit and Joey's subsequent collapse and had sent her husband up to Freudesheim, the Maynard home, demanding the two elder boys for the first four weeks of the summer holidays. Jack had willingly agreed and though Joey had protested furiously, it had been in vain. Mr. Embury carried off Stephen and Charles to join the seven Embury boys, and the previous day had seen Joey, Jack, the triplets and the very new twins arriving at Die Blumen, Joey having given her word of honour that she really would rest properly while she had the chance.

The eldest of the Maynard tribe by precisely half-an-hour, Len, at nearly fifteen, was an attractive creature. She was tall and slim, moving gracefully. She combined her mother's delicate, mobile features with violet-grey eyes, a perfect complexion and a curly mop of dark chestnut hair. She had an air of responsibility which made her seem older than she was. When you are the eldest of a long family and are born responsible, that may well happen. As both Joey and Jack believed in discussing family affairs with their elder children, so far she had shown little or nothing of the usual awkwardness of her age. Len had never felt that she was up against her elders and Joey was hopeful that she, at least would escape it. The nearest they had come to it so far had been over the question of Len's "hair-do."

She had been begging for some time to be allowed to wear her lengthy mane in a pony-tail, but Joey, who disliked the style whole-heartedly, had held out till now. Then she had given in.

"Very well. You may try it for the holidays and I'll do my best to become reconciled to it. I *don't* like it and never did, but I know you've got to be like the others or die! Only don't blame me if you have to spend hours combing out tangles at bedtime. Does Con want to try it, too?"

Len had shaken her head. "She says she's sticking to her two tails until she's grown up and then she's going to wreath them right round her head. Margot means to stick to her bob. She says it's less trouble."

"Lazy brat! All right. Go your own way and be happy and I'll try to like it."

There, the conversation had ended, but Len, feeling self-conscious about it, had left her hair as it was till this morning when she had wakened early and taken advantage of the rest of the sleepers to try out the new coiffure.

As she stood at the door, gazing with beauty-loving eyes at the blue lake with its mountains rising all round it, she put up her hand to make sure that it was still tidy.

"It *feels* O.K.," she said to herself. "If we go on any specially wild trips, I can always plait it again for the time being. We're lucky, though! Mama does try to see our point of view, even if she doesn't exactly like it. Well, now for a first saunter round! What's the time?" She glanced at her watch. "H'm! Ten past six. Two hours till brekker. I'll go and see what I can find in the kitchen first."

She skipped back into the house, ran along to the kitchen and after rummaging was presently perched on a corner of the table, a mug of creamy milk in one hand and a thickly buttered slab of delicious holey roll in the other. She had hoped her sisters would come with her, but try as she might, she had found it impossible to rouse either. It was a pity, but she wasn't going to stay in the house on a gorgeous morning like this just because they chose to sleep like a couple of logs!

However, before she had finished her snack, the kitchen door opened and Con and Margot bounced in, both very indignant.

"*Well!*" Margot began, "I do think you might have called us!"

"I tried," Len said when she had swallowed her mouthful, "but you were sleeping like all the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus rolled into one, so I gave it up. Buck up and get something to eat and then we'll take a stroll. Milk in that place and bread and butter over there. Buck up!"

Con, the dark member of the trio, since she had black hair and deep brown eyes, went to seek the milk, and Margot, reddy-gold and blue-eyed, sawed off two hunks of bread and slapped butter on them.

"Hi!" Len exclaimed. "Bread and butter—not the other way round!"

Con chuckled as she brought her brimming mugs to the table. "Better lower your voice. If we rouse Mamma, Papa will have a lot to say to us."

"Oh! I forgot! But she isn't likely to hear us, seeing their bedroom is at the front on the other side. I've finished my eats. I'll just go and scribble a note to leave on the hall table so that no one fusses. Anyhow, we'll be back for brekker." She rinsed her mug and put it away before she departed and the other two hurriedly bolted their share before following her.

They found her busy in the dining-room, laying the table. "Then Anna won't have any reason to complain," she said as she went round with the plate-basket. "Put out the table-napkins, Con, and you get the honey and butter, Margot, will you?"

They bustled about on tiptoe and presently left the house, swinging their big, shady hats by their elastic, feeling righteously virtuous. At present, it was only pleasantly warm, but from all the signs, it was going to be a hot day and they had had the need for shielding their heads from the fierce rays of the mid-Europe sun well dinned into them. You could protect your eyes with coloured glasses, but they were no surety against sunstroke. Hence, the need for hats!

"Which way shall we go?" Con asked as she closed the gate quietly behind her.

"I vote we walk to Seespitz to meet the morning train," Len said. "Then we could go on to Briesau and have a look at the old school. We can do it all right. There's a steamer up the lake that touches there at twenty to eight and if we catch that, we can be at home by ten to. That O.K.?"

"It's O.K. by me," Margot said, "but I'll tell you what would be O.K-er, and that would be to get the boat out and row across."

Con shook her head. "Papa has the key and anyhow, he said we weren't to go on the water by ourselves until he said so."

"Oh, bother! So he did. Then we must make do with the steamer. That means that we mustn't miss it or we'll have to walk back and we'll be late all right then."

"All right. I'll keep an eye on the time," Len promised. "Come on!"

They set off along the broad road that led round the lake on the eastern side. Presently, they turned off and took their way across the water meadows at the head, arriving at what was grandly called the Seespitzbahn—merely a roof supported by long props—in time to see the arrival of the little mountain train. It was the first train of the day and was run mainly to bring supplies to the hotels and the bags of mail for the Post. On this occasion, no passengers descended from the open carriages, though the scene was a busy one with hotel porters claiming the hampers and boxes which brought the day's necessities up from the plain. The girls watched while the men piled their loads on to hand-trucks or barrows, some wheeling them aboard the little white steamer—one of two, which plied on the blue waters of the lake; others wheeling off theirs along the road. When the last was aboard, the gangway was unhooked, the steamer uttered a warning hoot that echoed round the mountains and began to back away from the landing stage with much thrashing of water.

"That's great!" Len said when the white ferry finally turned and was steaming across the lake towards Buchau, the first of the tiny hamlets at which she called on the downward journey and where their home was. "We shall have just decent time to walk to Briesau, take a look round and catch her on the return journey. It couldn't fit better! Come on! Let's get cracking! I want to see all we can."

They set off along the western shore where a broadish footpath ran alongside the lake. At the other side of the path, the mountain rose, at first by a steep slope; then came the

beginnings of a narrow track which gradually widened. At the foot of the slope lay a wide ditch, but at present, it was dry.

“What gorgeous air this is!” Con, the second of the triplets, remarked, elevating her pretty nose to snuff rather like a dog who scents liver.

“We’re so high up. I expect that has a good deal to do with it,” Len said sagely. “We’re three thousand feet up here and that’s higher than we are at home by five hundred feet, anyhow. Con! Do stop snoring like that! Anyone would think you had adenoids!”

Con grinned at her. “Keep calm! I was only *smelling*. When do you think Papa will let us go out on the lake? I want to know if you can *really* see the city that was drowned out when it was formed.”

“Of course you can’t!” Margot said scornfully. “That’s only a legend. I say! Isn’t the water *blue*?”

“Mother always said it was the bluest thing in water she had ever seen,” Len reminded her. She turned to gaze up at the mountain wall. “It must have been about here that she bounded off that pathway into the lake when she was about our age.”^[3]

[3] Jo of the Chalet School.

The other two giggled.

“What a splash she must have made!” Margot said. “It must be at least eight or nine feet up and if she leapt right across everything into the lake she’d go with a wallop! How they must all have loved her!”

Len laughed. “She always says they were all pretty wet from that walk. But we can’t stay here all day. Come on, you two! Step on the gas a little!”

At this point, the mountain wall swung out in a sharp curve and the path with it. The trio stepped out smartly as they rounded the curve. At almost exactly the same moment, two boys and a girl came tearing along in the opposite direction. The bigger boy, who was slightly ahead, crashed in between Len and Con, nearly knocking Con, who was nearest the edge, over into the lake. Len shrieked and grabbed wildly at her sister just in time to save her. He, having caught his toe in a rut, crashed headlong on to the path. The other two nearly fell over him, but Margot’s hand caught the girl’s arm and steadied her while the younger boy staggered madly and ended up in the ditch.

“Oh, I say!” the girl panted as she got her balance. “I’m ghastly sorry! Thanks a lot! I might have taken quite a toss!” Then she was pouncing on the fallen leader. “Roger, you low hound! Hand that over pronto!” She dropped down on his back just as he was beginning to roll over, and stretched to snatch an exercise book he held in one hand. The other boy, having got to his feet, came to her aid.

“Two to one! Not fair!” Roger gasped, wriggling so vigorously that he nearly ridded himself of her.

“Not fair—nothing!” she retorted, clinging to her perch like grim death. “Take it from him, Roddy!”

Roddy gave a wrench at the book and freed it. “Got it!” he announced triumphantly. “You can get up now, Ruey!”

Ruey was on her feet at once and grabbing her precious book from Roddy. Roger rolled over and began to sit up. Len gave a cry of dismay as he did so.

“Oh, gosh! You’ve cut yourself—badly! Just look how you’re bleeding! And it’s filthy dirty, too! We must stop this and get you cleaned up at once! Wet a hanky someone, and the

rest of you tie yours together. This is an artery. It's got to be tied up pronto!"

Even while she talked, she was on her knees beside him, mopping at the blood with her own handkerchief. Then, seeing that it was no use, she dropped the handkerchief and felt for the pressure-point, her face white as she recognised the spouting blood for what it was. She pressed hard and the spouting slowed a little. But it was not enough and already Roger was sheet-white and his lips turning blue. Ruey hurried to his side with a dripping handkerchief with which she tried to sponge away the blood. Len looked round desperately.

"Some one bring me a good stout twig for a tourniquet! *Quick!* Roger's looking awfully sick and faint!"

"I'm—O.K." Roger himself said weakly. "Just a bit of a cut. Surface cuts—always bleed—a lot."

"You keep quiet!" she ordered, even as Roddy dashed to the nearest bush with open knife and started to hack off a stout branch. "I told you it was an artery. But we've got to stop this bleeding at once."

Roddy was at her side, trimming his branch before cutting it short. Con and Margot had knotted their handkerchiefs together and now Margot, gently pushing Ruey to one side, knelt down opposite her sister and passed the makeshift bandage round the leg. She tied it as tightly as she could, Len still pressing on the pressure point with all her force. Roddy held out his wood, now reduced to a manageable size and Margot thrust it under her final knot and twisted it sharply.

Roger roused himself to protest. "Hi! That hurts!"

"Maybe! But it's stopping the bleeding!" she returned.

"Con, go and see if you can find a 'phone anywhere and ring for Father. If it's an artery, it ought to be tied up as soon as possible."

If it had been later in the day, there would have been a constant coming and going along the path; but it was still only a little after seven and except for themselves, there was no one about. Len realised this as she twitched Roger's own handkerchief from the pocket in his shorts and tied up the branch to keep it from slipping. Con had jumped to her feet and she was looking round in search of the nearest chalet.

She suddenly squawked, put her hands to her mouth and let out a long, clear yodel that carried right across the lake. The solitary boater who had just paddled out from the far side, heard her and glanced over his shoulder, by which time, she was jumping up and down and waving madly.

"O.K.! It's Papa! He's got the boat out! He's seen us and he's heading for here as hard as he can go!"

"Semaphore him 'S.O.S.!' " Len ordered. "I don't like Roger's looks *at all!*"

Neither, for that matter, did anyone else. He had gone grey and his eyes were only half-open. One anxious hand on his wrist told Len that he was icy cold, for all the rapidly increasing warmth of the day. Ruey, supporting his head, looked at the other girl with terror in her eyes.

"He—he isn't—"

"It's shock," Len said as firmly as she could. "He needs warmth and an injection of some kind. Papa will know what to do. Is he coming, Con?" She dared not look up from Roger for herself.

Con, meanwhile, had been semaphoring vigorously and Jack Maynard, realising that some desperate emergency had arisen, was putting his back into it. His boat fairly flew across the

calm water and though it seemed endless ages to the frightened girls and Roddy, it was really little more than three minutes before he was leaping out on to the path and kneeling down beside the boy.

“Hold the boat, Con!” he ordered as he pushed Len out of the way. “Now let me see. H’m!” as his gaze fell on the deep, jagged cut which was still oozing slightly. “Severed artery! This must be seen to at once. Hold that twig, Len. Don’t let it slip. I must tighten the knot.”

Len gripped the ends and held fast while he undid Margot’s knot and retied it, hauling on it until even the oozing ceased. Then he stood up.

“I’ve nothing here. I must get him over to our place on the other side.” He looked at Ruey who was still holding Roger’s head on her knee. “*You*—what’s your name?”

“Ruey Richardson,” she gasped. “And these are Roger and Roddy, my brothers. We’re the Three R’s.”

“I see. Where are you staying?”

“We’ve got a chalet a little way along the Tiern Pass.”

“Right! Then off you go and tell your mother what’s happened——”

“We haven’t got a mother. There’s only Dad and he was up on the Tiernjoch to see the dawn and won’t be back for ages. There isn’t anyone *to* tell.”

He nodded. “Right! Then go back home and get Roger’s bed ready. I’m taking him over to our place at Buchau in the boat where I have everything I’ll need. I’ll get this seen to and bring him along after a bit—probably about a couple of hours. Len, you and Margot go with her. Roddy, you get hold of Roger’s shoulders—steady, now! No jerking or jarring we can help. I want him lifted into the boat. Then set off as hard as you can go to the other side with Con and be ready to help me when I get him there. Are you ready? Lift!”

Con, the fleetest of the triplets, had already set off at a run, but Len, who had done a good deal of ambulance practice at school, remained to help move Roger into the boat, while Margot had taken Ruey’s arm and was trying to get her to make for the Tiern Pass and the chalet she had said they were using. Ruey resisted with all her force, though.

“I’m going with Roger! I must be there to help.”

The doctor waited until he had the collapsed boy safely in the boat. Then he looked sternly at her. “There isn’t room for you. The best thing you can do is to go and get that bed ready. Len and Margot will go with you. Make her drink some hot coffee, Len, and see that it’s good and strong. And have your breakfast, all of you. I’ll send Roddy along as soon as I’ve got Roger tied up. But I can’t stop here to argue with you. The best thing you can do for your brother is to obey me. Take her along, you two!”

He turned his back on the distraught girl, getting carefully into the boat. Roddy pushed it off with a long, steady push before he sprang up and tore off after Con. Jack was very sorry for Ruey but, like Len, he did not like Roger’s looks, and the sooner he could have the boy over at Die Blumen where he had a supply of all he was likely to need, the better! He bent to his oars and the boat shot off across the water.

Len put an arm round Ruey’s shoulders. “It’s all right,” she said, wishing inwardly that she didn’t feel so shaky, now that she was no longer entirely responsible. “Come on, Ruey! You’ll have to show us the way, for we don’t know it ourselves, and Roger’s bed must be ready for him when Father brings him.”

Ruey said nothing for a moment. Then she suddenly sank down on the path and burst into tears.

"Oh, it's all my fault!" she sobbed. "And I promised Mummy I would look after them and take her place as far as I could! Oh, Roger, Roger!"

Len pulled herself together. "You stop howling!" she ordered. "That won't help Roger at all. Come on, Ruey! You heard what Father said. If you really want to keep your promise, you'll take a grip on yourself and get up and show us where to go. Don't cry, anyhow!"

Tears were, as they found out later, very foreign to Ruey, but she had got well away, and it was fully ten minutes before Len and Margot had succeeded in calming her sufficiently to get up from the path and go with them. The thing that really brought her to it was the sound of voices round the great curve. It was bad enough that Len and Margot had seen her break down. If utter strangers were to behold the phenomenon, Ruey felt that she would be disgraced forever. She gulped hard and then, with a triplet on either side of her, set off towards the triangular spit of land that was known as Briesau—a village of hotels and chalets, all scattered about the triangle, and the largest village on the shores of the Tiernsee.

"We'll go right round this side," she said when they had reached the white fence that railed it off from the path to Seespitz. "We have to go right up into the apex, you know, and quite a little way along the Pass. It stands in that place where it looks as if someone had taken a bite out of the mountainside. D'you know it?"

The Maynards did not. They rarely troubled the big Tiern Pass.

"Oh, well, Dad chose it because he can get up into the mountains so easily from there. It's a bit on the lonesome side, but not too bad. Come on!"

She led them round by the fence, over the little stream, a mere trickle of water at the moment though, as Joey could have told them, it was capable of becoming a wild torrent at not much more than a moment's notice, and up on to the broad road of the Tiern Pass. It was not meant for much traffic, other than foot or mules and was, in fact, falling into disuse, since there were now two other roads to the Tiernsee which were much easier. Here, about half-a-mile along, the track broadened to a depth of about a hundred and fifty feet and here stood a chalet of one storey, raised above the ground on stout wooden stilts six feet or so high. Here Ruey paused and fumbled in the pocket at the back of her grimy shorts.

"Here we are!" she said, as she produced a big key. "The steps are round here at the side. Come on, you two! Roger's bed will be every which way. We came off without making them until after brekker. We'll see to that first."

"Oh, no, we won't!" Len, her own woman again, said firmly. "First of all, we're going to have coffee and rolls. Papa said it would be a good two hours or so before he brought Roger home and you're all in. Meal first; bed-making after!" And to that she stuck, though Ruey protested. But, for once in a way, Miss Ruey Richardson had met someone who could be even more stubborn than herself—which was saying something.

Chapter III

EXPLANATIONS

"Do you really mean that you keep house and do all the chores?" Margot asked as, breakfast ended, the three girls got up from the table.

"Oh, the boys help me, of course," Ruey replied, setting to work to clear the table. "Put the butter and milk in here, Len. The rolls go into that mug. There's a towel hung up inside the cupboard door, Margot. If you'll wipe, I'll wash."

It was plain that she had recovered from her first shock, though she still looked white, and observant Len had seen that she had crumbled most of her roll on her plate. They cleared away in ten minutes and then Ruey led them out of the big living-room which was also the kitchen, and into a fair-sized bedroom at one side. Two narrow beds stood there, the clothes lying in a heap on the floor beside them. Ruey grimaced at them and then laughed rather forlornly.

"That's the boys. They sleep here. I have a slip next door and Dad has the only other room of any size. It has to be his study as well as his bedroom, you see. We'd better attend to this first. Your father may be bringing the boys back any time now and he did say Roger's bed must be ready."

She moved to the bed nearest the window and Len went with her. They turned the narrow, hard mattress between them, shook up the one pillow and then put on the sheets and one thin blanket which were all the clothes it had. Roddy's was done next and when Ruey had picked up the soiled shorts, shirts and handkerchiefs used the day before and tossed down anywhere when the boys had gone to bed, there was nothing more to do there. Evidently, the Richardsons believed in living hard. Ruey's own room was little better, though it did contain a mirror hanging over the chest of drawers and the bed had a coverlet of blue linen embroidered with bunches of flowers.

Ruey evidently thought she had better explain. "The boys made such a mess of their coverlets, that I took them away," she said. "They don't really need them this weather. Perhaps I'd better put them back, though, if Roger is likely to be in bed for a day or two."

"It 'ud make the room look more cheerful, wouldn't it?" Margot suggested.

"I suppose it would. It doesn't matter most of the time. We only sleep in our bedrooms. The counterpanes are out here in the big chest."

She went back into the living-room and took the coverlets from the great chest that filled up nearly the whole length of one wall. The girls spread them over the beds and certainly the room looked better as a result. But though they said nothing, both Len and Margot were inwardly horrified at the sheer bareness of the place. It contained nothing but what was strictly necessary. The living-room had four chairs, the table, the chest, a big armoire at one side of the room and, at the back, an electric cooker. The cupboard where the china was kept had a place for cleaning materials and the food was stored in a closet-like place behind.

"It might be a shack on a desert island," Len thought. "There aren't even curtains at the windows, and not a cloth to the table. Are they so frightfully poor? Even so, Ruey could always pick flowers and put them in a jam jar and it would be better than *nothing*!"

"Like to see Dad's place?" Ruey asked when she reached that point. She opened a door at the side to show a long narrow room, running from back to front of the chalet. "He has his

books along this wall, you see, and his bed's at that end behind that curtain. There's his desk under the side window. Those things are maps of the sky. He's an astronomer, you see."

Len and Margot looked round. Apart from the fact that it contained rather more furniture than any of the other rooms, they could not see that it was any better than they were. To two girls accustomed to a dainty home, the place was appalling. But at least *one* of Len's puzzles was answered. The Richardsons were not paupers. The books were housed in finely carved bookcases and many of them were handsomely bound. The desk and the chair before it were as good as anything they had ever known and a small table at one end bore a set of china which both recognised as being valuable.

Ruey drew them back into the living-room and shut the door. "Dad usually has his meals alone and I keep his crocks and silver in there. The boys are so careless and they are the most awful smashers."

Margot faced round on her and for once, she chose to be as tactless as Con ever was—and Con had a reputation in the family for saying whatever came into her head, regardless of anything but her own ideas.

"Do you really run the whole show, Ruey? Then why on earth don't you have things—well—*prettier*?"

Ruey flushed. "Oh, I know it's all awfully plain and—utilitarian. But with the boys around, it's a lot easier for me. I like pretty things all right, but vases get upset if you look at them and I told you both Roger and Roddy are frightful about smashing things. It seemed better just to get the cheapest I could and to have nothing but what we absolutely needed. I suppose *your* house has decent curtains and carpets and things like that? Well, we have those at home in England. Mummy always kept things nice. But it made so much work for me when—after we were alone, that I just gave up. Anyhow, out here, we're out practically all day and I thought it didn't matter for the time we were indoors."

"Don't the boys help out at all?" Margot persisted.

"Well, they do the heavier chores, like cleaning boots—when they're done!—and things like that. Sometimes Roger helps me to polish when I have a cleaning fit on. Mostly, though, I just sweep over the floor and dust things a bit and that's all."

Len decided to take a hand. "I expect, though, Roger will have to put in two or three days in bed after a cut like that. Hadn't we better cheer up their room a bit more? What about hanging some curtains—if you've got any?"

Later, she was to decide that Ruey Richardson was one of the sweetest-tempered creatures she had ever met. She showed no resentment at Margot's strictures and when Len herself proposed the curtains, she merely nodded.

"Oh, yes; there are some curtains in the chest. Perhaps you're right. Shall I fish them out and we could try them. The rods are there all right."

The curtains when unearthed, proved to be striped brocade, evidently cut out of much larger ones. The three hung them at the casement of the boys' room and after looking round critically, all three agreed that they were an improvement. But when Margot asked if they hadn't a rug or two to lay beside the beds, Ruey shook her head.

"Never thought of bringing them. I did pack the curtains because I didn't know if they would be needed or not."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing Roger will need if he has to stay in bed," Len said. "And that's a table. Have you a little one you could spare? And a cloth for it?"

"There are two or three folders in the shed behind," Ruey said, making for the door. "Come on! We'll get one and set it up. I'm glad you thought of it, for it never crossed my mind. But of course he'll have to have something to put his trays on and everything else he wants. This way!"

The tables were unearthed and one was carried up and set up beside Roger's bed. Ruey produced a square of oriental embroidery which hid its nakedness and then they had done all they could do. This was just as well, for at that moment, a long, yodelling cry sounded and all three made for the door and went down the ladderlike steps in time to see the doctor coming along with Roddy by his side and behind them, a couple of men carrying a stretcher on which lay Roger, still very white, but with that horrible greyness gone from his face.

Ruey leapt forward. "O.K.?" she asked as the stretcher came level with her.

"Quite O.K. So take that look off your face," Roger told her with amazing cheerfulness, all things considered. "Is the percolator going? I could do with a cup of your patent coffee."

"I'll set it going in a second," she returned. "Just let me see them get you up into the place."

Meanwhile, Jack Maynard was surveying the steps with dismay. It was not going to be easy to get his patient into the house, and though Roger was cheery enough, he was anything but well.

"Does the ground come up at the back?" he asked Roddy abruptly. "Those steps will be a bit of a snag."

"They're the only way in," Roddy informed him, looking rather anxious.

"Oh, well, there are worse troubles at sea! Right! You go up and get all the doors open." Then, as Roddy scrambled up the steps, he turned to Ruey. "Is his bed ready? Got it open? I want to move him as little as possible for today."

"It's made," she replied. "I didn't open it, though."

"You stay with Roger! I'll see to it!" Len cried readily, bounding after Roddy. "Margot, come on and get the perc. going. Roger wants a drink after a doing like that."

Margot ran after her and the doctor and Ruey were left with the men and Roger who had closed his eyes from sheer weakness and weariness. Ruey took his hand in hers. It felt limp and feeble. He opened his eyes and gave her a faint grin.

"Perk up!" he murmured. "I'm O.K. Be all right in a day or two."

"I expect so," she replied. "Oh, here's the doctor again."

Jack had been talking with the stretcher bearers. Now he turned to the two Richardsons.

"All right! They say they can manage. Ruey, you go up first, will you? Help Margot with that coffee. We'll have Roger up in a jiffy now."

Ruey went reluctantly, but she had sense enough to see that obedience was the best thing at the moment. She found Len stripping back the counterpane and sheet, and Margot, having set the percolator to drip, busy bringing cups and saucers out of their cupboard.

"I don't know where you keep your milk and sugar, Ruey," she said. "Get them will you? Roger ought to have a good dollop of sugar with his."

Ruey went for them without a word and by the time the men had succeeded in getting the stretcher up the steps and into the living-room, everything was ready for a hot drink. The doctor came in first and the moment the men had entered, his hand went to Roger's wrist. That wounded hero himself lay white and still but, at the doctor's touch, he opened his eyes again and gave another of those faint grins, though he said nothing. Jack Maynard nodded and looked round. Len was at the door of the bedroom and she beckoned and then stood back well

out of the way. Five minutes later, Roger was lying in his bed, a home-made cage over the injured leg to keep the bedclothes off it, and his head raised by his own pillow, Roddy's and Ruey's, which Len brought at a word from her father.

Joey had tucked two of the Die Blumen hot-water bottles on either side of him before he had been brought across the lake and Jack handed them to Len to refill. Luckily Margot had had the sense to put a kettle on the big electric cooker and the water was boiling. Ruey poured out a cup of coffee, sweetening it liberally before she brought it into the room where the doctor held it to his patient's lips. Then Margot arrived with the bottles which were tucked down beside the boy. The doctor drew the newly put up curtains to darken the room and, after a last taking of the pulse, he nodded to the girls to go out and followed them, drawing the door close after him.

"Well, that's that," he said. "Bring on that coffee, one of you. The men can do with a cup and so can I. Have a cup yourselves."

He waited to talk to the younger Richardsons until he had rewarded the men for their labours and they had departed. Then he looked at them.

"First of all," he said, "I want to know if you have any idea when your father will be back, Ruey. Roddy seemed very vague about it."

"I don't really know," she replied. "He was up on the Tiernjoch all night and he may stay there till tomorrow morning. He said when he went that it was possible. There's a hut up there, you know, and he took his telescope and so on, and said he was rigging them up for observation of some kind. I don't really know what he means. He doesn't tell us much."

"I see. Well, you can't look after Roger by yourselves. That's a very nasty cut—right down to the bone, and jagged every which way. Our maid Anna will come across this evening and stay with you tonight. He ought to be all right after that, but it's just possible he might run a bit of a temperature later and you couldn't cope with that sort of thing. But she's got to get a sleep this afternoon of course. She can't come much before eighteen—I mean six o'clock. Len, I think you had better stay here with Ruey. If I'm wanted, Roddy can come to the nearest telephone and ring for me and I'll come at once. In the meantime, how are you placed for food? And what have you for Roger?"

"We've got plenty of tins," Ruey said slowly. "And I've got some jars of meat extract. Eggs, and milk, of course. What *ought* Roger to have?"

The doctor frowned. "Better give him a cupful of meat extract. And can you make a custard pudding? That's the sort of thing he should have for the present."

"I can mix the meat stuff," Ruey said. "I've never made a custard. We mostly live on eggs and tins of meat and fruit."

"What about you, Len?"

"I can make a custard all right," Len returned briefly.

"Good! Got plenty of eggs?"

"I think so. I think there are a dozen or so."

"Right! Then you're all right for today. Don't go in to Roger more than you must. Leave him to sleep as long as he will. Sleep is his best medicine just now. One of you ought to stay up here so that you can hear him if he calls. Go to him then, but not unless. Margot, you come back with me. Mamma is making up a parcel of things Ruey will need—rubber sheet and so on—and you can fetch them and stay for the rest of the day with Len and Ruey. I'll send some eats along as well. Now, I'm going. Come a little way with me, Len."

He patted Ruey on one thin shoulder and went down the steps after Len who had scrambled down in short order.

“What is it?” she asked, looking up at him with wide, intelligent eyes.

“Just see that that girl does as I’ve said. Her brother isn’t killed—not by a long chalk—but I can see she’s all on edge. Make her take another cup of coffee and eat something as well. She ought to go and lie down for an hour or so after the shock she’s had, but I don’t suppose wild horses could make her. She’s as obstinate as a mule, judging by her jaw. Try not to let her dwell on the thing. Tell her about school—or some of those wild yarns of your mother’s schooldays. Now that’s all. I’ll come over with Anna this evening unless you’ve any need to ring for me. Oh, one last thing! When you do go in to Roger, watch that bandage for staining. There ought not to be any, but you never know. If you see the slightest sign, ring for me at once. I’ll be staying about the house all day.”

“O.K.,” Len said sturdily, though she felt rather frightened at the responsibility.

“That’s all, then. See you later!” He bent to kiss her and then vanished down the path after Margot, leaving the eldest hope of the Maynards to clamber back into the chalet and seek Ruey with the information that she could do with a light meal and what about it?

Chapter IV

ROGER

“Ruey! What’s your real name?”

Ruey turned at this sudden question. She had been gazing dreamily across at the rock wall of the other side of the Pass. It was late in the afternoon. Roger had slept a good deal of the time, rousing up only once or twice to demand a drink. His bandages had remained immaculately white and there was more life in his face. Therefore, Ruey had been able to dismiss much of her early fear from her mind, though Len, with a wider experience and infinitely more thoughtful, kept touching him lightly whenever she went into the room. If Roger began a temperature, he would inevitably become restless and restlessness might start up fresh bleeding.

Con and Margot had returned to the chalet shortly after midday, bearing two baskets. One contained jelly, a jar of koumiss and various other articles of food for the patient; the other held substantial comestibles for Roddy and the girls. He, by the way, had cleared off to obey Joey’s command to find fresh milk somewhere after he had confessed to her that all they had at the chalet was tinned milk. For some time, the triplets had been entertaining their new acquaintance with accounts of their doings at school. As it was stiflingly hot, they had set open every door and window they could and when washing-up had been done, had congregated about the front door, Len and Ruey squatting in the doorway, Con sprawled along the narrow verandah which ran round the house; Margot sitting on the penultimate step of the ladderlike construction, her legs thrust between two of the treads to dangle lengthily the wrong way round. It was she who had fired the question at Ruey.

“Go on!” she said, as that young woman remained silent. “You can’t possibly have been christened ‘Ruey’. It just isn’t a name—or not that I’ve ever heard.”

“I suppose it isn’t,” Ruey said slowly. “It’s what I’ve always been called, though.”

“It’s a short, isn’t it?” Con queried.

Ruey nodded. “Short for Ruhannah—if you’ll believe it! That’s my real name—Evelyn Ruhannah Richardson.”

“Lawks!” Margot said blankly. “Where did they dream *that* one up?”

“Well, ‘Evelyn’ is after Mother. *She* was ‘Evelyn’.” She pronounced it “Eve—lyn” and Con, the lover of sweet sounds, nodded approvingly.

“Where does the ‘Ruhannah’ come in?” Margot demanded.

“That was my American grandmother—Father’s mother. She died shortly before I was born and he was mad keen for me to have it, so Mother agreed. They couldn’t have two ‘Evelyns’ in the family and ‘Ruhannah’ was a bit long for every day, so they made it ‘Ruey’.”

“I like it rather,” Con said, her head on one side. “It’s unusual. And Mamma will be all over it when she hears it.”

“How right you are!” Len spoke with emphasis.

“Now tell me what yours is short for!” Ruey swung round on her. “Con and Margot are really Constance and Margaret, of course; but I never heard of anyone christened just ‘Con’.”

“It might be ‘Consuelo’,” Con told her with dignity.

“Never heard of it! You’re making that up, aren’t you?”

“Oh, no; it’s a real name,” Margot assured her. “It’s Spanish, I think.”

"But what would an English girl be doing with a Spanish name?" Ruey asked with a good deal of point. "But never mind that. You tell me what 'Len' is short for."

"'Helena,'" the name's owner said disgustedly—Len hated her stately name—"But don't you ever call me that unless you want a row of the first magnitude. I'm called after my godmother, worse luck! But no one ever gives me 'Helena' unless they mean to skin me alive. I loathe it!"

"Oh, it's not so bad as all that!" Ruey retorted. "Have you ever thought that you might have been 'Ellen'?"

Len's eyes widened with horror. "For Heavens' sake! What an appalling idea! All *wide-wide-worldish* and pi—— There's Roger calling!" She broke off suddenly. "You'd better go, Ruey. And what about eats? I'll put the kettle on and make some tea, shall I? Mother said it would be refreshing for him and she's sent half-a-pound across, so I think we'll have some, too, instead of our usual coffee."

"Might as well, since it's there," Con agreed, scrambling to her feet as Ruey vanished into Roger's room. "Here's Roddy coming with the milk *at last*! Hello, Roddy! Did you wait till they brought the cows in for milking?"

She hung over the verandah railing, her charming face alight with mischief.

"I did not. I merely hunted round till I found somewhere I could get milk. It's goats' milk, anyhow. All the cows are up on the alp, whatever that may be. But the minute I mentioned your mother's name, the good lady was all over herself to dish out the milk. Here you are." And he set the can down at one side of the doorway before wiping his hot face with a filthy rag. "Phew! It's hot! How's old Roger now?"

"Pretty fair, I think," Ruey replied from the inner doorway. "He's wide awake and wants a drink. Says he's parched." She picked up a glass and went to the big covered bucket in which they drew water from a nearby spring as they needed it. "Oh, bust it! The water's all gone. Go and bring some more, Rod."

"Give him some milk," Len suggested as the sweating Roddy groaned loudly. "Tell him I'm making tea and he shall have a cup the minute it's ready. Let Roddy have a minute's rest. He's just brought the milk."

"O.K.," Ruey agreed cheerfully. "Hand me that jug to dip it up, will you?"

She departed with her glassful to return a minute later and announced, "Roger won't look at it. He says he'd rather wait for the tea. Can't you buck up with it, Len? That kettle doesn't seem to be anywhere near boiling."

"It isn't," Len assented. "Find me a little pan, Ruey, and I'll make some specially for him. Ours can wait a minute or two."

"Make it in a big cup," suggested Margot, pausing in her task of cutting bread-and-butter, "and strain it off into a wee pot so that it isn't standing on the leaves."

"Oh, good idea! You'll find one somewhere on the top shelf of the cupboard, Margot. And I say! Your dad said Roger was to stay flat for the present. How about giving it to him from the *pot*? He does spill so frightfully with a glass. If he drank it from the spout, though, I don't think he could."

"Like a feeding-cup," Len nodded. "That's a brainwave, Ruey. Get me a big cup and I'll make it in that and have you a strainer? Fine! We can strain it and then he won't get any leaves in his mouth."

It was done and when the tea was ready in a gay little pot which Margot had found with some difficulty in the furthest corner of the top shelf, Len and Ruey went to the bedroom

to interview the patient.

He was lying flat on his pillows and observant Len saw that a flush was deepening in his suntanned face. She said nothing, but when she touched his hand, her face was grave, for he was far hotter than he ought to have been and his skin was very dry. She made no comment, but slipped an arm under his head, raising it slightly, while Ruey inserted the spout into his mouth.

“Suck!” his sister said with a grin. “It’s all right. Con thought of cooling it with the last drop of water in the bucket, so it won’t scald you.”

Roger obeyed and he drained the pot and demanded more, even as Len lowered his head carefully. She drew back the sheet, but the doctor had made very sure of his dressing and the bandages were still snowy and unstained under the cardboard box from which he had manufactured an emergency cage.

“So *that’s* all right,” Ruey said with relief when they were out of the room. “And he’s getting his colour back, too.”

Len looked at her doubtfully. “He’s all right so long as he lies still. The question is—will he?”

“Why shouldn’t he?” Ruey asked, startled.

“Well, it strikes me he’s starting a temp. He’s awfully hot and dry. I wish you had the ’phone in, Ruey. Papa ought to know about it.”

“What’s that?” Roddy had overheard and come to join them.

“Len thinks Roger’s starting a temp,” Ruey said, looking rather white.

“Dr. Maynard did say that he might. I’ll scoot over to the Stephanie and ring up from there, Len. Buck up, old Rue! Roger’ll be all right in a bit. The doctor seemed to expect some fever from what he said.”

He snatched up the ancient linen hat he wore against the heat of the sun and even as he talked, was scrambling down the steps as hard as he could go. Ruey looked at Len with sudden anguish in her eyes.

“It’ll be a good while before your dad can get here. Is there anything we can do until he does come?”

Len considered. “We might try sponging his head and hands,” she said. “It won’t do any harm and it might help. And one of us ought to be with him in case he starts tossing about. Don’t look so terrified, Ruey. Roddy says Father expected it. But I’m certain we ought to keep him as still as we can. Where are Con and Margot?” as she suddenly woke up to the fact that her sisters seemed to have vanished.

“We’re here!” Con called from the bottom of the steps. “We thought cold water might be needed, so we took the bucket to the spring. Gosh! But it’s icy, that water! Why has Roddy gone haring off like that?”

“To fetch Father. Roger seems to be running a temp.” Len brought a cup as her sisters came with the brimming bucket and set it down carefully in its place. “Get me some clean hankies, Ruey, and come and help me. This ought to be quite useful. It’s the coldest water I ever felt. Bring me a bowlful, one of you, and stand by to give me more when it’s done.”

She hurried across the living-room floor with her cup and Ruey, driving back her terrors forcibly, went after her to get the handkerchiefs. Margot arrived a minute or two later with a bowlful of the cold water to find her sister sponging the hot head. Roger was restless, though he still retained his senses.

“Beastly hot!” he muttered. “Ouf! ’S better!” as the dripping handkerchief wiped his face.

"Towel, please!" Len said. "No need to soak the bed. This'll cool you a little, Roger, but lie still! Do you want to start the bleeding again?" she added severely.

Roger grinned faintly at her, but lay quiet for a minute or two and she went on steadily with her sponging. Ruey was almost too frightened to be much help, for she could see the flush deepening in her brother's face and even her inexperience knew that it was not a healthy colour. Len kept her steadily changing the cloths and when one towel showed signs of soaking demanded another.

Con came in presently, followed by Margot, each bearing a cup of tea.

"Take this, Ruey," she said quietly, holding it out. "Margot and I will go on with the sponging while you and Len drink your tea. Then we'll go and get something to eat and when we've finished you must go and we'll relieve you. Papa always says you can't do good work on an empty tummy and it's ages since we had dinner. Drink it up—all of it!"

Poor Ruey did as she was told with a grateful smile. But when Con and Margot came to send her and Len into the sitting-room to have tea, it took all three girls all their time to get her away from Roger's bedside. He was beginning to mutter incoherently and his sister was almost in a panic.

Margot settled her at last. "Oh, go on, Ruey, and stop making an ass of yourself!" she ordered. "You'll be fainting next! Do you want us to have to fuss over you when we ought to be looking after Roger?"

That turned the scale. Ruey went, very reluctantly, and Margot, looking very efficient, took up the business of sponging the burning head and hands. Con remained in the living-room until she had seen Ruey choking down the delicate slips of bread-and-butter she had cut *à-la-tartine* for greater convenience. Then she slipped out to help Margot who was finding her hands full, for Roger was tossing more than a little.

The other two hurried through their meal and went to join the nurses and when Roddy arrived, breathless and panting with the news that the doctor was coming at once, his superior strength was called on at once, though Con cut more bread-and-butter and stood feeding him as he forcibly held Roger's leg still.

Jack Maynard found them still at it when he arrived far sooner than they had expected. He had borrowed a motor cycle from someone at the big hotel at Seespitz and bucketted along the rough paths at an amazing rate. He nodded when he saw what they were doing.

"Good!" he said. "That'll have helped to keep the temp from rising quite so fast. Has he been badly restless?"

"He's done quite a bit of tossing," Len admitted. "Roddy and Margot have held him as still as they could. I don't *think* he's started anything, but we haven't had any time to look."

Jack drew back the sheet, but there was no sign of staining so far. He tossed it on to a chair, for it was soaking in places. Then he turned his attention to mixing the draught he had brought with him. When it was ready, he sent everyone to the far side of the room except Margot.

"You and Ruey are worn-out, Len," he said quietly. "Con, I want a fresh bowl of water. Ruey, get me a fan if you have such a thing. If not, make one from a newspaper. Now, Margot! The other side of the bed. Slip your arm under his head and raise it a very little. That's right! Spoon, one of you!"

Len slipped out to bring a teaspoon. She also brought the teapot, now rinsed and clean and he nodded.

"Excellent! Pour this into it. Now give me that spoon—bowl end, please."

With the handle of the spoon, he carefully levered Roger's teeth apart and then, a little at a time, poured the draught down the boy's throat. When it was done, he handed everything back to Len, motioned to Margot to lay Roger's head back and took the newspaper fan Ruey had contrived with shaking hands.

"Now go away, *all* of you! He's got that and he'll soon be better, but he needs absolute quiet until my dose has taken effect and you're all revved up to the limit. Len! See that you all have a proper meal while you wait. Leave that door wide open. Let's have all the air we can! Take 'em away, Len!"

Len picked up the teapot and the spoon and tugged at Ruey's arm. "Come on! Papa means what he says and anyhow, it's best for Roger."

"Go along, Ruey," the doctor said quietly, never taking his eyes off the flushed face against the pillow. "You don't come back here until you've eaten a decent meal, so mind that. Roger will be better presently, I promise you."

Very reluctantly, Ruey went out with the others and Roddy followed. But the triplets had their own difficulties in making the girl eat. Ruey drank all the tea they could give her, but she declared that food would choke her.

"O.K.," Len said at last. "Only don't blame us if Papa won't let you go near Roger again tonight."

"He couldn't—he wouldn't—" Ruey stammered.

"Wouldn't he just!" Con exclaimed. "You don't know Papa! He'd do just that!"

Margot added her mite. "He always means what he says. We all know that."

Con had been busy with the bread. Now she brought some carefully cut and rolled pieces of bread and held one to Ruey's lips. "Try this, Ruey. I've cut it as thin as I can and it's all buttery. It'll just *slide* down."

"I *can't*," Ruey said desperately.

"Yes, you can if you try. Come on! It's quite true that Papa won't let you go back to Roger until we can tell him you've eaten a decent meal."

Thus urged, Ruey did her best, but it took an effort to swallow even Con's beautiful bread-and-butter and she turned away from one of Anna's best cream-cakes with a shudder of revulsion. Len saw to it that her tea was rich with the creamy milk and that was all they could manage. But even so, when the doctor came into the room a little later, it had done her good. Her face had lost its drawn, desperate look and there was a little colour in her lips.

"Excellent!" he said with a sudden twinkle. "Just what the doctor ordered, in fact. As a reward for doing what you were told, Roger's a shade easier. The temp's beginning to drop a little and he's not so restless. No; you mayn't go to him yet!" as she started up from her seat. "I want to get him off to sleep first. Then you shall go and take a peep if you can keep yourself tranquil: not unless. Fever patients can be very badly affected by the moods of those near them. Roger isn't so far gone that he can't feel it if you are all of a dither when you look in. Now listen to me all of you!" He paused to listen, but there was no sound from the bedroom. "Con, run along and ring Mamma and tell her to stop Anna coming. I'm staying myself tonight. Tell her you three will be over in time for supper. When you go, Ruey will have a glass of milk and go to bed. All in, aren't you, poor old lady?" He gave her a smile. "Never mind! It'll be all right in the morning."

Ruey returned the smile tremulously. "Are you *sure* he's all right?"

"Well, he's still rather higher than I like, but he *is* much quieter. It won't be long before he's cooler as well. I've had the bandages off and he's started nothing. All that sponging of

yours has helped him. I'm going back now. Meantime, you clear up this place, Ruey, and Len can help you. Roddy, have you another bucket? Then you and Margot go and fill it. Never know what you may want in the way of water. Now I'm going back. Chin up, Ruey! Roger's not killed, though I don't doubt he'll be very sorry for himself for the next few days."

He left them then, but he had managed to calm Ruey's wild fears considerably. An hour or so later, he allowed her and Roddy to take a peep. Roger seemed to be asleep and though he was still flushed, even their eyes could see that it was appreciably paler than before. His own girls would have like a peep, too, but he shook his head and sent them off to reassure their mother and keep her company. He made Ruey drink a glass of milk and eat a light meal—Roddy needed no making!—and then he sent the pair of them to bed and settled himself to keep watch over his patient.

At midnight, Roger roused and asked for a drink. His temperature had dropped considerably and when he had had it, he went quietly to sleep again. The doctor watched him for another hour, but there was no mistake. The fever had broken as he had expected and though the boy would be very limp for the next day or two, he would soon recover. Jack left him and went to look at the other two. Roddy was snoring beatifically in his father's bed. He was not an imaginative youth and he trusted the doctor completely. Ruey lay with damp lashes, but she, too, was sleeping quietly. The doctor pulled up the sheet and thin blanket over her, for though the days were hot, the nights tended to be cool. Then he scribbled a note—just three words; "Roger much better"—and left it beside her before he went to the living-room to make himself some kind of a meal. That done, he had a last look at Roger. Then he undressed as far as he could, lay down on Roddy's bed, and made what he could of the remainder of the night. Twice he roused during the night and padded over to the other bed, but Roger slept quietly.

When Ruey's anxious face peered in at the door shortly after six in the morning, he was still sleeping and the doctor was able to tell her that the worst was over and she might be happy again.

Chapter V

PROFESSOR RICHARDSON

Roger was considerably better next morning after a long night's sleep. He awoke up free of fever and complaining of feeling "rottenly all in". However, as Jack Maynard knew, that would soon pass. He had breakfast with Ruey and Roddy and after giving Ruey certain instructions about the patient, he set off for his own home where he was welcomed with open arms by his wife and the three girls.

"How's Roger?" Len demanded when the greetings were over.

"More or less O.K. I say, Joey, that man hasn't showed up so far and Ruey seems to think he may or may not come today. Meantime, Roger is likely to be peevish later on and I don't see young Ruey dealing with it. Suppose you and the kids take a picnic lunch with you and go over presently. If the Professor has turned up, you can picnic somewhere around. If not, you could give Ruey a few tips and so on. What about it?"

"Can do!" Joey returned promptly. "Girls! Go and help Anna pack some eats and *don't* forget the drinkables. Jack, I want a word with you before you go off." For the doctor had arranged to go to Innsbruck to see about some things they needed.

As a result, shortly after eleven Ruey, leaning over the verandah rail, shaking out her dusters, beheld a little cavalcade coming up the path to the Pass. Len was wheeling the big double pram in which Geoff and Phil were sleeping sweetly. Con and Margot were walking arm in arm with a tall lady whom she guessed to be Mrs. Maynard. It must be owned that Ruey promptly turned shy. Apart from the mistresses at school and the lady housekeeper who had been in charge of their house up till June of that summer, she knew very few women. After his wife's death, the Professor had moved from the place where their home had been ever since Ruey herself was born, and taken a house not far from Croydon, and Miss Wotherspoon was not given to making many friends.

Nevertheless, the shyness vanished almost at once, when a blushing Ruey came down the steps to meet them and Len introduced her breezily: "Hello, Ruey! Papa says Roger's going on all right. This is Mamma, come to see if she can help you out at all. This is Ruey, Mamma. Where's Roddy, Ruey?" Mrs. Maynard had shaken herself free from the other two and come to lay long slim hands on her shoulders and give her a gentle shake.

"Snap out of it, Ruey!" she ordered. "No one is ever scared of me and I don't propose to let you be the first. Has your father arrived yet?"

Partly it was the very informal greeting, partly the beautiful, golden voice, but mainly, as Ruey realised later, the friendliness in the black eyes smiling down at her. Anyhow, she forgot to feel shy and half afraid and replied eagerly.

"Not a sign of Dad. Very likely he won't turn up till tomorrow. Oh, are those the new twins? Can I see them?"

"You both *can* and *may*," Joey said with a wicked chuckle. "Show them off, Len, but *don't*, if you value your lives, wake them. It isn't bottle-time for another hour and more and when those two yell, they *yell*. Come along, Ruey. Phil at the top and Geoff at the bottom. They're quite nice, aren't they?"

Ruey hung over the pram delightedly. They were the first little babies she had ever seen properly. "Oh, what—what *sugarpies*!" she breathed.

"Quite nice, as I said," Joey replied nonchalantly. "But this place is well in the sun and he seems to be all set to show what he *can* do in the way of glaring when he sets his mind to it. Let's wheel them round the side of the house into the shade. There! They'll be all right for the present. Now I want to see Roger."

Roger was as easily captivated as his sister had been and Roddy, when he turned up later, was no whit behind them. By the time they had all had a midday meal, Roger had been made comfortable and left to take a nap with a small handbell Joey had brought over on the bedside table so that he could ring if he needed anything, and the rest of the party had settled down to while away the hottest hours of the day with paper games. The Richardsons and the Maynards might have been friends for years and later on, Ruey found herself asking Mrs. Maynard's advice about making the chalet more presentable and like other people's homes.

Joey nodded. "I can do that, all right. I'm glad you see that it's needed. Honestly, Ruey, there *can* 't be any need to have the place as bare as it is."

"The boys are so awfully careless—and they do smash things so," Ruey said in self-defence. But this was swept clean away.

"Then at their age, it's high time they learnt better ways! Most boys are tiresome that way, but your pair will have to learn to overcome such little weaknesses. They'll never learn so long as you give them a place that looks like *any-day-but-Christmas-Day-at-the-workhouse!* Come on! Let's go and see what you've got that we can adapt."

The result was that when Professor Richardson did turn up about noon on the next day, he found his home invaded by what looked like a horde of strangers and everyone was so hard at work that he had mounted the steps and was standing on the verandah before they sighted him.

His own Roddy and a red-headed girl were hard at work, painting the floor of the living-room a warm golden-brown. Ruey and another girl with a gleaming ponytail of chestnut hair were polishing the great chest and were both warm and grubby. A dark-eyed girl was busy washing what looked like all the china the chalet contained and a tall, very dark lady was wiping for her. Roger seemed to be the only member of his family missing. The Professor stood stock still and gasped.

The sound attracted everyone—for the first time since they had started work that morning, *no* one happened to be talking!—and they all stopped what they were doing and turned to stare at the doorway.

Ruey came to her senses first. Dropping her polisher, she made a beeline for her father, crying, "Hello, Dad! I wondered if you'd come down today? We're doing a spot of cleaning and fixing-up," she added, quite unnecessarily.

Her father nodded. "Thought I'd best come down and see you were all right," he said abruptly. "Who are all these, Ruey?"

"They're the Maynards," Ruey said, as if that explained everything.

Joey, dropping her tea-towel, came forward to explain. "Professor Richardson? I'm so glad to see you. Ruey, run and fetch your father a glass of my fruit drink, will you? I'm sure he can do with it if he's been coming down in this heat. Carry a couple of chairs out to the verandah, Con, and we'll go there and I'll explain while you folk get on—No; *not* you, Roddy! Not with those hands!"

Roddy, who was paint nearly to the elbows, grinned, dropped back on his knees and went on with his painting while the dark girl left her washing-up and came to carry a couple of deck chairs which were new to the bemused man out on to the verandah. Ruey followed with a

small tray covered by an embroidered cloth and on it a tall glass of greenish-yellow liquid and a plate with biscuits.

Joey led the way and he followed, too startled to do anything else. When they had sat down and the young fry had gone back to their jobs, the lady smiled at her host and said, "Do try my drink. It's an American recipe and really very refreshing on a hot day. The fact of the matter is," she went on as he sipped it, finding it agreeably tart and very cold and acceptable, "your Roger has had a slight accident. Oh, nothing very bad: a rather nasty cut, as the result of a collision between your three and my triplets. The girls and Roddy got off without any harm, but Roger crashed down with all his weight on the sharp edge of a stone on the path and cut his shin to the bone. Luckily, my husband, who is a doctor, was on the lake and the girls spotted him and yelled till he came to the rescue. He brought Roger over to our place at the other side to have the cut properly dressed and he said this morning that it was beginning to heal nicely. So *that's* all right."

She paused and the Professor, who had got his breath by this time, replied. "I see. Er—thanks very much. Then is Roger still with you?"

"Oh, dear no. We brought him over and put him to bed where he still is. He'll have to keep quiet till there's no risk of his bursting the stitches. He severed an artery, unfortunately and lost rather a lot of blood you see. But my husband says he may get up tomorrow a little and he ought to be pretty well all right by the end of the week. But what with one thing and another, he ran a rather high temperature the first night and we've been keeping an eye on him and helping Ruey out a little. She's only a youngster, and it was rather an alarming situation for her to tackle single-handed, or with only Roddy. But here comes my husband," she added as Jack appeared in the doorway, having been occupied in giving his patient a sponge-bath until now. "He'll explain that side of it to you in detail. Jack, this is Professor Richardson. My husband, Professor, Dr. Maynard."

She got up and left the two men to have it out together, while she went back to her job. Presently, they appeared in the doorway to be greeted by a shriek of, "Mind the paint, Dad!" from Roddy. "Walk on the bare spots."

The Professor did his best, envying Jack Maynard's long-legs as he strode from spot to spot easily. The Professor himself was a small man and it took him all his time to manage it. But at last they were out of the room and standing by the bed where Roger lay, rather pale still, under his tan, but otherwise looking like himself.

"Hello, Dad," he said with a grin. "Given the stars the go-by?"

"Don't talk nonsense, boy!" his father said irascibly. "I'm going back later, but I thought I'd better come down and write a cheque for Ruey. I expect she's running short by this time. Well, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh, this and that," Roger returned airily. "Nothing to write home about. It's just a cut and, thanks to Doc, here, it's healing O.K. You don't have to worry."

"Er—so it seems," his father said. "Glad to hear it. Well, I'll go and write that cheque. Ruey can give me a meal of sorts, I suppose? Then I'll have it and be off in a couple of hours. You can get on all right without me, can't you?"

It was just as well Jack had left them alone. He would certainly have had a good deal to say at this very easy shifting off of responsibilities. The fact was that the Professor was the last man on earth to be a father. He had no idea how to tackle his family. It had been all right while Mrs. Richardson was alive. She had dealt with the children and, except for money, he had had no worries about them. When she died, he really had not known what to do. Miss

Wotherspoon had been the answer, but she had left him that June to make her home with a sister. He had already made all arrangements for this sojourn in the Austrian Alps and the only way he knew how to deal with the problem was to rent this chalet which happened to fall vacant and bring the three out to Tiernsee with him. That it meant taking them away from school at the half-term, just hadn't registered with him. He had seen them established, handed over what he hoped would be a sufficient sum for expenses and then scurried off to his work in which, to be quite frank, he was absorbed, body and soul.

The trio had said he was an astronomer, but the truth was that his greatest interest lay in space-travel. He was convinced that the planet Mars sustained living beings and he was all agog to be in the forefront when contact was made with them—if they existed. With that in view, mere children, even his own, counted for comparatively little. He had never understood his three and he made no effort to understand them. Equally, they made little effort to understand *him*. Their mother had told them years ago that Dad was an astronomer, engaged in important work and they must not interrupt him. It was a convenient label and they let it go at that, though Roger, now some months past sixteen, was beginning to realise that this state of things was odd, to say the least of it.

"I suppose we can manage," he said slowly in reply to his father's question. "I didn't mean to give Ruey a fright and that part of it's over, thank goodness. But it was rather a thing for a kid of less than fifteen to have to cope with by herself as she would have had to do if the Maynards hadn't been so decent."

"Oh, well," his father said absently, "as you say, it's over now and these friends of yours seem inclined to keep an eye on you. You'll be all right with them." It is safe to say that he had not taken in one half of what Roger was saying.

His son looked at him thoughtfully and said no more. The Professor left him, went to his own abode where he wrote out a cheque that made Joey Maynard open her eyes when she saw it and, after eating the meal Ruey set before him, without realising very much what he had, bade his family good-bye and departed with the remark that he might not be down again for a few days.

Joey and Jack were both secretly indignant when they heard the whole story next day. Joey was even rather stunned by the matter-of-fact way the young Richardsons took it, but had the good sense to say nothing to them. However, she promised herself that the next time the Professor arrived from his eyrie, she would come along and give him a good talking-to. It was more than time that *someone* had a finger in their pie and made the man see that he was being almost criminally neglectful of his family in leaving three youngsters to themselves in a foreign country as he did!

"It isn't even as if any of them could speak the language!" she said furiously to Jack the next day when the pair of them were alone. "And Ruey is a *girl*! What sort of protectors are a couple of schoolboys for a girl of not quite fifteen, I'd like to know? If he wants to bury himself in his work, by all means let him. But to go and do it without first making sure that his three are well looked after is, as the girls would say, the outside of enough! I should have thought after what's happened to Roger he would at least have stayed down till he had found someone *responsible* to take charge of them and not gone skiting off the same day like that!"

"He *has* found someone responsible to look after them—*you*!" Jack pointed out with a broad grin. "Butting in again, my girl; butting in again! And you were deprived of your male young and Felicity and brought here so that you might have a good rest. I hope I'm nowhere round when Madge hears of all this!"

“Madge would be butting in herself if she knew of it!” Joey retorted.

“H’m! Yes; you’re right there. Well, I must say it doesn’t seem to be doing you any harm and I know well enough that no matter what I may say, you’ll go on looking after those kids, so I’ll save my breath until I see you overdoing again. That, I *will not have*! So remember, Joey. Apart from that, you can mother those three to the top of your bent. Ruey, at least, seems to stand in need of it. But as for giving Richardson a talking-to, I doubt if he’d take in even half of what you might say. That man might as well be on the moon or Mars, for all he seems to bother about things terrestrial!”

“There’s one thing,” Joey said more quietly.

“Oh! What’s that?”

“That at least they are set here where people are decent on the whole. And now we know how they are situated, we can keep a firm eye on them and their doings. All the same, I don’t exactly like their being alone up there at night. If this goes on, I shall invite them to come here while their father is dickey-dancing about on the mountain-tops, chasing flying saucers or space-ships or trying to find out if Saturn has a few more rings than anyone else has seen or whatever it is he *does* take an interest in; and they can shut up the chalet until he condescends to come down and take over his own job of looking after them for himself!” After which she announced that as soon as Roger was able to get about, she proposed to take all the party except the babies for a day’s picnic up to the Sonnalpe and *perhaps* show them what was called in the family, “Joey’s cave” which had figured as the starting-point for one of her wildest trips and which had become a legend among the present generation at the Chalet School.^[4]

[\[4\]](#) The Chalet School in Exile.

Chapter VI

RUEY BEGINS TO WAKE UP

“Well, seeing you can get about all right now, Roger, I think we must consider that picnic I mentioned.” Thus Joey on the Saturday of the following week.

The Professor had made good his remarks and more or less washed his hands of his family, quite content to leave them to their own devices and whatever care the elder Maynards might see fit to bestow on them. Joey had raged in private to Jack and he had taken hold of things with characteristic firmness. He insisted that whatever they might choose to do during the day, the Richardsons must sleep at Die Blumen. The chalet at the mouth of the Pass was too far from any other house to allow three youngsters to be alone in it at night. Such a thought might never cross their own father’s mind: quite definitely, it never did. Jack Maynard, with his feet firmly set on earth, and commonsense as one of his leading qualities, could see all the dangers that might just possibly accrue and he stamped heavily on Ruey’s protests that they had often been left like this and no harm had come of it.

“Dad’s never fussed about it,” Ruey told the doctor rebelliously.

“Your Dad, my child, lives up in the clouds for the most part,” he replied blandly. “I don’t! Doctors can’t! He evidently relies on us to keep an eye on you three and if you’ll tell me how I can manage that with you more than a mile distant, I’ll be grateful. No, no, Ruey! It doesn’t matter so much in the daytime but at night, you’re going to be where I can lay my hands on you at a moment’s notice so save your breath to cool your porridge.”

And once again, Ruey the stubborn found she had to give in and might as well do it gracefully. Neither of her brothers would back her up. Jack had been rather more plain-spoken to Roger than to herself and Roddy didn’t care where he slept.

Therefore, they were all seated round the breakfast-table when Joey fired her shot out of the blue. All the excitement had not troubled her in the least. In fact, she seemed to thrive on it. Her appetite had returned; she slept long and soundly o’ nights. By this time, she had lost her unnatural pallor and ceased to look “all eyes” as her family phrased it. She had already written to Mrs. Embury, reclaiming her two eldest sons as soon as an escort could be provided for them and she had been murmuring sweetly about calling back the remainder of her family as soon as possible. Jack had turned an amiably deaf ear to this last, though he had made no objection to Stephen and Charles joining the family party.

“Ye—es,” she said, buttering her third roll lavishly. “I think we’ll fix it for some time next week. Jack, when do you propose to fetch Steve and Chas?”

“Tuesday, probably. I’ll go straight there by road, starting early. Then I’ll put the boys on the early morning train from Basle which’ll get them to Innsbruck at about six in the evening. Some of you can meet them and bring them on here. *I’ve* got to go back to the Görnetz Platz for a day or so—some business cropped up that ought to be dealt with promptly. I’ll be back either Friday or Saturday. I’ll let you know as soon as I know definitely myself.”

“It’ll probably be Saturday, if I know you,” Joey said feelingly. “In any case, you won’t get here from the Platz much before late evening, so we’ll fix Friday for the picnic and that’ll give Roger’s leg another week. You certainly have quick-healing flesh, Roger, my lad. The only person I know who seems able to beat you is Mary-Lou Trelawney. O.K. Then *that’s* settled.”

“Keep to short expeditions for the next two or three days,” Jack advised. “Don’t try that leg too hard yet, Roger. Where are you having your picnic, Joey?”

“Up on the Sonnalpe. If it’s a decent day, I might go on and show everyone our cave—the one where we took refuge the evening we had to go on the run from Hitler and Co., Ruey. Not one of you has seen it, though the girls know the yarn inside out. How about it, everyone?”

The acclamations that greeted this idea made her clap her hands over her ears and roused the twins sleeping outside the window in their big pram. By the time order had been restored and the babies soothed back to sleep, the coffee was cold and Len had to march off for fresh. When it came, however, and they had settled down to their meal again, it was all more or less arranged. On the Thursday, the two Maynard boys could settle in while all the females of the party prepared food for the next day. They would set off early on the Friday morning, taking food for the day with them and Joey agreed that they would do their best to be back at Die Blumen before sunset. As the twins were on bottles, they could quite well be left in charge of Anna and Rösli, her coadjutor, and with Anna at the head of things, no one need worry. She had been with Joey since that young woman’s marriage and helped to bring up all the Maynard children. In fact, so devoted to them was she that when she had a chance to marry, she turned down the offer at the last moment. Joey, she was certain, could never get on without her!

On Tuesday, Jack set off at the unconscionable hour of half-past four in the morning, for he had to walk down to Spärtz at the foot of the mountain, where the big, powerful Lagonda was garaged, there being no room for it at the Tiernsee. The whole crowd had spent an instructive Monday evening in working out the route from the maps and Jack was a fine driver. At ten that evening, Die Blumen was rung up from Montreux with the information that Joey’s husband had arrived safely and the boys would be coming by train as arranged the next day.

“So that’s all right,” she remarked, turning away from the telephone. “Now off to bed, you folk! Breakfast at half-past seven tomorrow. Con and Ruey, mind you are ready in advance. Pick out your lightest shoes, Con. It’s a nuisance you’ve ripped your sandal like that, but it can’t be helped. Roger, if you want to shave do it now, before you go to bed. There won’t be time in the morning.”

Roger, who had begun to shave twice a week and had announced that he meant to go to Innsbruck with a clean face, grinned. He was still slow at the business, but as Ruey had informed him at the beginning of their sojourn in the alps, he was a Hairy Esau and the proud producer of at least half-an-inch of beard by the end of three days. Ruey’s rude remarks, backed up by Roddy’s even cruder ones, had moved Roger to invest in a safety razor and shaving cream and though his juniors jeered at him, he stuck to it, though at first his face no less than his temper was rasped on every occasion that he experimented.

The quartette set off at the early hour Joey had arranged, leaving the house and the rest of the family in charge of Len and Anna. Joey explained as the tiny mountain train clanked and grunted its way to the plain that she had a good deal of shopping to do. She had an idea wandering about her brain and, as she said, she never knew when it might suddenly become fully fledged and then she must get down to it at once. Hence, she needed typing-paper and a couple of typewriter ribbons and some packets of carbons. Anna had weighed in with a lengthy list of household supplies. Con’s new sandals had to be bought. Finally, and here Joey turned her most dazzling smile on Ruey, it was more than time that Ruey had a decent frock or two as well as some new shorts and shirts.

Ruey gaped at her. “But—but I’ve *got* two more pairs of shorts,” she exclaimed at last, “and two shirts. And I *have* got *one* frock with me!” And she glanced down at the shabby, outgrown green cotton she was sporting.

“Well,” Joey said after a judicial look at it, “it’s *clean*, but that’s about all you can say for it. At nearly fifteen, you ought to have at least a couple of decent frocks—and the underneaths to go with them. As for your shorts, they’re nearly as bad as that frock and your shirts aren’t much better. It’s all very well when you’re a kid. No one wants a mere child to take too much interest in clothes. But at your age, Ruey, you *ought* to be taking more than you do. Anyhow, you’re having the frocks, etc. I’ll buy them and settle up with your father when next he comes down to earth. My five-year-old Felicity wouldn’t be seen dead, the sight you seem to like to go about! It’s quite wrong.”

Completely crushed by all this, Ruey remained silent. In fact, after living for a full fortnight with the triplets, who also spent most of their time in shorts but had dainty frocks for formal occasions, she was beginning to open her eyes to her shamefully shabby attire. She meekly agreed to all Mrs. Maynard proposed and returned from Innsbruck attired in a pretty, simple frock of gingham with appropriate underwear beneath and a big straw hat, similar to the ones the triplets wore. A couple of large parcels contained not only a couple of pairs of well-cut shorts and half-a-dozen smart shirts, but two more frocks and all their extras. She had been fitted out with new sandals as well. Joey, sending Con and Roger off to visit the Hofkirche, had also marched her victim to the hair-dressing establishment of Herr Alphen, a very old friend,^[5] and had had her rats-tails beautifully cut to the nape of her neck with a fringe which reduced the length of her thin face, and then shampooed so that the dusty-brown hair gleamed and looked quite unlike the usual dried-hay effect to which Ruey had been comfortably resigned for the last two years or more. In fact, her appearance was so altered, that Roger’s jaw dropped when he and Con met the other two for a midday meal. He almost failed to recognise his sister in the trim schoolgirl who was waiting for them with Mrs. Maynard!

^[5] The School at the Chalet.

Having once voiced her opinion with her usual vigour, Joey said no more on the subject. She meant to let Ruey’s transformation work in its own way. But Len had also been taking notes quietly and she carried on with the good work.

Die Blumen was not a very large house and when the two Maynard boys as well as the three Richardsons were added to the party, they were fairly full. Len had suggested that Ruey should share her room and her mother agreed. Con and Margot had another. A third was dedicated to the babies and Rösli; and Roddy had been put in to the room Stephen and Charles had. A slip had been handed over to Roger and by that time, most of the bedrooms the Maynards had furnished the year before, were well-filled.

Everyone went to bed about nine o’clock. Stephen and Charles were tired with the long journey and Ruey and Roger were also weary after the day in town. Joey had promised her husband before he went that she would keep early hours while he was gone and, indeed, there was nothing to keep her up, once the youngsters had gone to bed.

They said “good-night” and parted in the corridor, Joey having firmly arranged a bathroom-list beforehand to avoid any scrapping over the bathroom. She herself went to see that the babies were all right and the boys, at any rate, made all speed to get to bed.

In the pretty room in which Ruey secretly delighted, she and Len set to work. They chatted amiably about Ruey's new trousseau and it was not until that young woman, decked out in a pair of the new pyjamas Joey had provided threw back the bedclothes to get into bed, that Len changed the subject.

She herself was standing before the toilet-table, brushing out her mane of hair. She caught sight of Ruey's activities in the mirror and swung round.

"Ruey Richardson! You're not going to bed like that? You've never brushed your hair or said your prayers! Come out and do both pronto!"

"I don't say prayers much, and I'll give my hair a good doing in the morning."

"You'll do no such thing! What on earth," demanded Len, hitting on the one argument that would carry much weight with Ruey, "do you think your pillow-case is going to look like if you do that every night? Going to bed with all the dust of the day in your hair! I thought you were so mad on saving work?"

Ruey stared. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, you think of it now and come and give your wig a good brushing. I've finished with the mirror." And Len rubbed her brush and comb with a damp cloth before laying them to her side of the toilet-table. "And as for prayers, you must please yourself, but I think you'll be jolly ungrateful if you don't even say a 'Thank You' to God after the decent time you've had today. Rotten bad manners, I call it!"

These were new lights on the subjects to Ruey. She stood by the bed, staring down at her spotless pillow-case—Len and Anna had changed all the beds that morning, while Margot and Roddy washed up the breakfast-things—and revolving the new ideas in her mind.

"I hadn't thought about messing the pillow-case," she said at last.

Len finished the last of the two loose pigtails in which she plaited her hair for bed, tossed it back over her shoulder and plumped down on her own bed.

"Honestly! Don't you ever brush your hair before you go to bed?"

"I told you I never thought of it. I will, now you've pointed it out, of course." Ruey stalked over to the toilet-table and seized her brush with which she proceeded to belabour the shining hair.

"You'd better have a band round your head to train that fringe to keep in place," Len advised. "I like it awfully, Ruey. It makes you look quite different. Have you got one? Then I'll give you one. I've plenty of ribbons." And she came to rummage in a drawer and produce a broad ribbon which she tied round her friend's head when Ruey finally laid down the brush.

"Now," she said when it was done, "I'm going to say my prayers whatever *you* may do, so pipe down for a few minutes, will you?"

She had dropped on her knees by the side of her bed and crossed herself before Ruey could reply. That young lady put her brush away and followed her example rather self-consciously. Religion had meant very little in her life so far. It had been rather a shock to her when she saw Len kneel down, night after night. It had been quite as much of a shock to Len to see Ruey tumble into bed without. She had held her tongue so far, but tonight, seeing her friend unexpectedly exhibiting a very feminine delight in her new clothes, she had suddenly decided that it was time she did something about it. Ruey had had a jolt out of her old ways. If she could take such pleasure in new clothes, then she might also accept a suggestion that it was only decent to show a little thankfulness to the One who had prompted Len's mother to provide them.

Ruey mumbled the Lord's Prayer to herself and followed it up with a somewhat incoherent word or two of thanks for her new clothes and the new friends. That done, she remained kneeling, wondering what more she could say. She could find nothing, but she stayed there until Len got up. Then she rose too, and gave her friend a grin.

"I hope you're satisfied now?" she remarked.

"What *you* need," Len replied with decision, "is to come to our school. Why don't you, Ruey? Your father doesn't seem to mind what you three do. I don't suppose he'd object if you asked him to let you come with us, would he?"

Ruey looked startled. "I hadn't thought of it. I've always gone to day-school and so have the boys. But now Miss Wotherspoon has left, I don't know what will happen. Another housekeeper, I suppose—if we can find one."

"Who got her for you?" Len asked as she switched off the light and pulled back the window-curtains to let the moonlight stream in.

"Mummy's friend, Mrs. Morrison. She was our doctor's wife. Only then we lived outside of Harrow and we haven't seen her for ages." Ruey paused to get into bed. "I don't know who would see to it. I don't somehow see Dad picking one out."

"From all you've told me about him, neither do I," Len said candidly. "Ruey, haven't you *any* relations to take hold for you?"

"Nary one!—Or not that I know of. Oh, glory! You know, until you mentioned going to boarding-school, I never thought what would happen when we went back to England. Something will have to be done about it, I suppose. I don't quite see what, though." Ruey, sitting bolt upright in bed, frowned fiercely.

"You'd better talk it over some time with Mamma. She'll be able to advise you. Myself, I honestly think the best thing would be for you to come to the Chalet School as I said and the boys to go to a public school, too. Then your father could have rooms somewhere where he'd be looked after—when he was there," Len added thoughtfully. "Does he often go skiting off like this?"

"Oh, goodness, yes! He was in America for six months the year before last. The year Mummy died, he'd been somewhere else—Australia, I think." Ruey pondered a moment. "Yes; that was the year he went there. Dr. Morrison cabled him to come back when Mummy—when Mummy——"

"O.K. I understand," Len said hurriedly as she faltered. She leaned out of bed and gripped one of Ruey's hands. "Don't you worry, Ruey. Mamma will see to things for you if you ask her. I know she will! And think over what I've said about asking your dad if you can come to our school. You'd like it, I know, and if you came you'd soon find yourself talking both French *and* German. We'd all help you. Now we must pipe down or Mamma will be banging to make us shut up. Good-night, old thing!" She squeezed the hand she was holding and then released it, rolled over and fell asleep almost at once.

Ruey lay awake for some time longer, thinking over all that had been said.

"I suppose it *was* ungrateful to grab everything and say nothing," she thought. "I remember Mummy used to make us say our prayers every night, but since then there's been so much to think of and I just haven't bothered. And of course Len was right about my hair. I wouldn't dream of going to bed without washing and doing my teeth, and it's much the same thing."

She rolled over on to her other side. "I don't know how we're going to manage without Miss Wotherspoon. How queer of me not to have thought of it before! I wonder if I really

should like the Chalet School? It would be an awful fag in some ways. From what Len and the others say you can't do just as you like, even when your prep's done. I don't think I should like that altogether—not after doing more or less what I like in the evenings and at the weekends. All the same, they seem to have jolly decent times. Those expeditions they've described! I've always wanted to go places and they do seem to do that at the Chalet School."

She turned over on to her other side. "It would be ghastly having to talk either French or German all the time, at first, anyhow. I don't mind the written work or even reading aloud, though Miss Harland does go on at us about our accents. It's the having to think what you want to say and putting it into *decent* French—or German! Still, I suppose you'd get used to it in time. Margot said that almost everyone could manage a bit by the end of the first term. At least it would stop me making an ass of myself and asking for something I didn't want and having everyone in the shop giggling at me—like that girl Con told me about—Grizel What's-her-name—asking for her hair to be rinsed with Holy Water when she meant *hot* water!"

At this point, Ruey began to giggle and Joey, making her nightly rounds to be sure that all was well, overheard her and opened in the door and came in, prepared to forbid any more talking. But it was only Ruey who reared up in bed at her approach. Len was stretched full length, sleeping the sleep of the just and weary.

"What's the joke?" Joey asked as she came to straighten Ruey's bed which looked like a haystack now.

"I suddenly thought about that girl Grizel, Con talked about," Ruey explained in a whisper.

Joey hushed her at once. "*Don't* whisper! Don't you know that a whisper carries far more than an undertone? Why aren't you asleep, you bad girl? It's long after ten and you've had a tiring day. You ought to be fathoms deep—like Len. Anything gone wrong with you?"

"No; only Len said I ought to go to the Chalet School with them and I began to wonder if I'd really like it, especially having to talk nothing but French and German two days each every week. That made me think of Grizel and I began to laugh. What do *you* think, Mrs. Maynard? Would I really like it?"

Joey's eyes danced. "I think it would be the best thing in the world for you. Of course you'd like it! I ought to know! I was there myself for more than five years. I'm one of the foundation stones, you know—the very first pupil. But this isn't the time to discuss it. I'll bring you a drink and then you cuddle down and go to sleep or you'll be half-dead when tomorrow comes. I promise to talk it over with you some time tomorrow, though."

She vanished with that, to return with a long, cool drink. Ruey drained the glass and then Joey turned her pillow, straightened the bed and left her after a motherly kiss and a murmured blessing. Ruey returned the kiss warmly before she finally lay down. But when the door had closed on Joey, she snuggled down on her pillow feeling considerably happier than she had done for a long time. She suddenly felt safe and protected. She never knew when the door opened again and Joey took a final peep, for by that time, Ruey was as deeply asleep as Len who never knew anything about it, and she was smiling in her sleep.

Chapter VII

PLAN FOR A PICNIC

"Now have we got *everything*? Two baskets of eats—one with the flasks—one with the mugs and other etceteras—my kodak—the box with the fruit—I think—I really do think!—that for once in a way, we've left nothing out!" Joey surveyed the pile on the hall table and the floor and nodded. Then she turned and eyed her party. All were in slacks, since it was as well to have their legs protected if they did any climbing, shirts and sandals. Len had a knapsack slung on her shoulders, and so had Stephen, the eldest Maynard boy.

"What have you two got there?" their mother demanded suspiciously.

"I don't know what Steve's got," Len returned, "but I've shoved in my first-aid kit and our plastics in *case* it should rain. You never know!"

"The barometer's too high for rain," Joey said, "but there might be a little mist towards evening. That's a good idea, Len. I'll get mine."

"Got it already. I've got our three and Ruey's and yours. I thought the boys could look out for themselves," Len responded cheerfully.

"Never thought of it," Roger told her, equally cheerfully. "It's an idea, though. Thunder seems to come up pretty fast in these parts. Get ours, Rod."

"Is that what *you* have?" Joey demanded of Stephen.

"Nope," he said briefly. "Got a length of line and my kodak and all the torches I could lay my hands on. Never thought of the old macs."

"Well, get yours, both of you. Those plastic things take up no space and you can roll them up and tuck them in somewhere. It's true enough about the thunder, though, I'd forgotten it. I hope you've seen to it that your batteries are all fully charged. Not much point in carting them along if they aren't. A waste of energy, in fact!"

"Chas saw to it," he replied, as Charles came back with Roddy from the cloakroom, both carrying the thin plastic raincoats they all had for taking on such excursions.

"Are we all fixed *now*?" Joey asked patiently. "Then pull your hats on and come along, or we shan't get anywhere except the Sonnalpe itself. If you want to go on to the cave, we'll have to bustle about a bit."

They pulled on the flapping white sun-hats they all carried and which were better for a trip like this than the big straws the girls usually wore during the great heats of the day. Then they set off, Joey leading with a stout alpenstock to help her over the worst places, and Con at her side. Roger followed with Roddy and the Maynard boys, all in a bunch and all talking loudly. Len and Margot brought up the rear with Ruey between them. They had all seized on the baskets, bags and boxes before Mrs. Maynard could get there and she found herself empty-handed except for her stick.

"What have I done to be so pampered?" she queried.

"Nothing! You're the guide and that may do you," Len told her severely as they left the back entrance to the garden and began to clamber up a narrow path that led by twists and turns up the slope of the great Sonnalpe from the back of their house. "Papa said the last thing before he left that we were all to look after you and see you didn't overdo while he wasn't here to cope with you himself."

"He *would*! To hear you all talk, anyone would think I was an elderly invalid, hardly capable of doddering about on the shore-road with the aid of two sticks! I only wonder you didn't try to get hold of a bath-chair for me!" Joey retorted.

"A lot of use a bath-chair would be on a path like this!" Margot flung back at her with a giggle. "You'd be over half-a-dozen times before we got you halfway!"

"True for you!" Joey relapsed into a giggle. "On the whole, I prefer to go on my own arched insteps. Which reminds me, you three Richardsons: look out for your feet and sprawling roots and snags. These folk are accustomed to mountain paths, but I imagine you are *not*!"

By this time, they were well away. The whole of the lower slopes were cloaked with a forest of black pine which made the way cooler than it would otherwise have been. This was offset by the clouds of flies that buzzed and spun round them. Before long, they were all flapping their handkerchiefs vigorously to ward off the pests. Finally Joey called a halt, produced her cigarette case and lighter and lit up. It helped a little, but not much.

"We ought really all to be smoking," Margot proclaimed loudly. "Just one isn't much good—not unless he's smoking that awful stuff the herdsmen use."

"Well, until you three are seventeen, you may not smoke at all!" their mother retorted. "And if you're wise, you won't start even then. I was eighteen before I ever did and at that, you've never seen me do much of it." She raised her voice to call to the boys who were now in front. "Roger! Want a cigarette?"

"No, ta!" came back the answer. "I'm a Rugger man. Can't spoil my wind with baccy. But I wish someone had thought of bringing a flit-gun along to cope with this lot. I'll see to it we have one another time—and plenty of Flit!"

"Good idea!" she agreed enthusiastically. "The next time anyone goes to Innsbruck we'll have a couple and carry them with us on our expeditions!"

This idea was acclaimed by everyone. The flies really were a complete pest. However, they were coming through the woods by this time and as the trees thinned out, the flies became fewer until, when they finally emerged in the open once more, they were practically gone.

"Mercifully, they retire to rest when the sun goes down, so with luck we'll avoid them then," Joey said as the stragglers came up and they moved on in a body.

"We've got butterflies now," Con remarked as a great sulphur-yellow flitted past. "Aren't they gorgeous, Ruey? Look at that tortoiseshell!" She pointed to a magnificent specimen just ahead of them, clinging to a wild snapdragon, its proboscis plunged deep into a blossom. "Oh, and there's a blue!"

"Gummy! Wish I'd a butterfly-net!" Roddy exclaimed eyeing the beautiful creatures covetously. "I say, Mrs. Maynard, can we chaps come up here some day and have a go at them? You could make the beginnings of a decent collection very soon in these parts, I sh'd think."

"Well, as you ain't got a net and I don't suppose you have the cash to buy one, there won't be much point in it," Roger pointed out rather brutally.

"Ruey's got cash, though. Didn't Dad give you a cheque before he went off, Rue? You can't have spent it all. You can spare me enough for a net, surely!"

"I haven't got it—except a few schillings," Ruey informed him. "I gave it to the doctor to take care of for me. As we aren't living at home, there was no need for it and I didn't want all that cash around with me."

"You'll have to wait till he comes back and go into it with him," Joey said. "*I'm* not taking any responsibility for it, I can tell you!"

Roddy fell back, disgruntled. The sight of all those beauties had aroused the hunter's instinct in him. Stephen glanced at him and came closer.

"Better say no more," he remarked in an undertone. "My young ass of a kid brother gave her a fearful shock before we came here. He's begun to collect eggs and went down a ravine to try to get a raven's egg. Then he stuck halfway and couldn't get back. A nice how-d'ye-do, it was!"

"Chas, do you mean?" Roddy and the other two had adopted the very unbeautiful abbreviation of Charles's name which his family all used.

Stephen giggled. "No blinking fear! Chas likes to *watch* things, but he won't take eggs or kill butterflies or anything like that. Don't go off thinking he's a sissy—he ain't! But he has some rum ideas about that sort of thing. Come on! They're leaving us behind." And he set off to scramble as hard as he could after the others.

Roddy followed him and by the time they caught up with the vanguard, he was breathless and no more was said about butterfly hunting. The sight of one of the tiny green lizards so often to be found basking on the limestone slopes in the sun turned the course of Roddy's thoughts and by the time he had decided that it needed more than normal quickness of the hand to catch one of the creatures, the others were lost to sight round the curve of the path and he and Stephen, who had remained with him, had to run to catch up with them.

Joey greeted the pair with a grin. "Well! Got your lizzie?" she asked.

"Too quick," Roddy returned laconically.

"Never mind. You couldn't possibly have carted him along and anyhow, why should you spoil his fun? He was having a gorgeous time, basking there in the sun. You made quite mess enough of that without shutting him up in some horrid little box with holes pierced in it. Live and let live, Roddy, my lad!"

"It wouldn't have lived, anyhow," Charles struck in. "Wild things usually don't. They just pine and die. I've seen 'em." Then he stopped talking.

The Richardsons had already decided that the second Maynard boy was the most silent person they had ever met. It wasn't shyness; that was quite clear, for if he wanted to talk, Charles said all he had to say without fear or favour. It was simply that unless he had anything to say, he held his tongue. Now, he turned away to stroll along by himself, his dark grey eyes keen to see any tiny happenings as he went.

"Is Chas going to be a naturalist?" Ruey asked Margot as they followed Joey.

Margot shook her head. "You know as much as I do. He's never said anything about it, though he's awfully keen on nature things. Steve's going to be an engineer and Mike means to enter the Navy. It's the only thing he's keen on. But no one knows what Chas means to do."

"Oh, well, he's only a kid yet," Ruey said.

"Hurry up, you kids!" Joey called at this point; and the conversation ceased as they all raced across the last of the short, thymey turf and scrambled over some steplike formations of limestone to find themselves up on the Sonnalpe at last.

It was well after eleven by this time and Joey's first care was to find a sheltered spot where she made them all sit down for elevenses. Len and Con, well warned by years of living in the Alps, broke off great fans of fern and swept the ground thoroughly in case of ants. Then they all squatted and Margot handed out plastic mugs of many colours which Joey filled with some

of Anna's homemade lemonade while Ruey was ordered to dole out three biscuits each from a box in one of the baskets.

"Mind you notice which colour is yours," Joey warned her party. "You'll have to use it again later on. Roger! How's the leg feeling?"

"Quite O.K., thanks. I don't say I'm not glad of a rest, but that's because it's so boiling hot. You get a good breeze up here, though." Roger rolled over on to his side and lay looking out at the wonderful panorama unfolding itself in the south. "That the Dolomites over there, Mrs. Maynard?"

Joey nodded. "Yes—if you look far enough. Those closer at hand are the Ziller Alps. We must see about a trip to the Zillertal. You'll like it."

"Isn't that the place where they have that miraculous natural arch of rock across the path?" Margot asked after she had drained her mug.

"It is. And further along there's a farm where I saw someone make the horns at us for the first time. That was a good many years ago, though. All this part has been opened up to tourists and I don't imagine there's anyone around now who's simple enough to imagine that strangers will bring them evil."

"How do you mean—'make the horns'?" Ruey asked, wide-eyed.

"You know the V-sign? Well, instead of making it *up*, you point your fingers at the person you're doing it at and it's supposed to keep the devil away from you."

"Gosh! Are there really people in civilised countries who believe in that sort of rot?" Roger exclaimed.

"Thousands of them," Joey replied serenely. "You'll find patches everywhere where people are pitifully superstitious, odd though it seems at this time of day. After all, if you live where you scarcely ever see a stranger from one year's end to the next, *and* you belong to people who have believed in that sort of thing for generations, you're rather inclined to carry on with the beliefs, aren't you? Only so many more people visit these parts now than did when we were first here, I imagine that sort of thing is dying out. And don't be superior, Roger. You get it in England as well as in Tirol, or Spain, say, in the mountains. I know there are places in East Anglia where they still believe in witchcraft. And it isn't so long ago since they lit the Bale Fires on Midsummer's Eve in various parts of Scotland and Northern England. And," she added slyly, "I've known people of quite decent education who refuse to go under ladders or nearly have fits if they spill salt or drop knives for fear they have bad luck."

Con, who had a rooted objection to spilling salt and Len who almost invariably made a detour round a ladder in the street, both went red and Ruey, who shared both silly superstitions, reddened with them. Stephen grinned at his sisters.

"Our matron smashed the mirror in her handbag last term," he said, "and she nearly conked out with horror."

"Another idiotic idea," his mother agreed. "What's more, it's downright blasphemous. As if God would allow you to be unlucky because of a stupid thing like that! Anyhow, there isn't really such a thing as luck. That's another silly idea."

"Then what is it?" Ruey asked.

"Mainly the result of your character. If you're careless, you'll do stupid things; but that's no reason for expecting all sorts of evils to follow. Instead of worrying yourself grey about what may never happen, your job is to see that such things don't happen because you're clumsy or careless. And now, enough of this! If you folk really want to see our cave, pack up

and we'll get on with it. You've a good way to go yet, let me tell you, and some scrambling to do before we get there—unless, that is, the landscape's suffered a change since I last saw it."

"It might," Charles said, looking up at her with dark grey eyes full of interest.

"How?" Roddy demanded with equal interest.

"Oh, dozens of ways!" Margot exclaimed. "There might have been avalanches and *they* can change the whole look of a place in half no time. Or a thunderstorm with the worst kind of lightning could do it. Or what about the war? The R.A.F. might have dropped bombs around here——"

"Only they never did," her mother cut in. "What a lurid mind you have, my child! I wasn't thinking of anything so sensational. *My* idea was that someone might have been inspired to make an easy pathway up and that was as far as I'd got. What have you been reading lately, Margot?"

Margot laughed. "Well, it was that thunderstorm we had last autumn when we were all stuck in the barn for hours and then had to wade across the stream nearly waist deep in water because it had flooded.^[6] You know what a mess it made of the motor-road. There were deep trenches in it and some *huge* boulders that Papa said had been brought down by the force of the water. Something of that kind might have happened to *your* path."

[6] The Chalet School and Richenda.

"Very true! I'd forgotten about that. Well, the best way to find out is to go and see. Everything safely packed? Sure you all know which mug you had? Good! Then come along and we'll go and investigate."

"Aren't we going to explore the village first and see the house where you used to live with Uncle Jem and Auntie Madge?"^[7] Con asked disappointedly.

[7] Eustacia Goes to the Chalet School, etc.

"Plenty of time for that another day. If that's what you want, though, we'll do it; only it won't leave us time to visit the cave, I'm afraid. It's quite a walk from here and, as I've said, a good old scramble part of the way. Which is it to be? You can't have both, you know."

"Oh, the cave, of course!" Stephen cried. "You've always sworn you'd show it to us the first chance. You pipe down, Con! Come on, Mum! Which is the way?"

Con relieved her feelings by a horrible grimace at her brother, but she gave in quite cheerfully, and they set out, Joey leading with Roger and Ruey and the rest following in a bunch. They passed what looked like a big hotel before they had gone far and Joey nodded towards it.

"That's the place where the school was moved after the Anschluss. It was decided that it would be safer to have everyone up here, so it was done during the half-term as all the girls had gone off and when they returned, they found themselves being whisked up here instead of trotting along to our own buildings."

"*Somebody* must have slogged!" Len commented. "How ever did you do it in just a weekend?"

"Well, actually, the decision had been taken much earlier and whenever anyone came up from the school, she brought along as much as she could manage—books and stationery and that sort of thing. Though I remember Bill—er—Miss Wilson I mean, turning up one Saturday morning with the school car loaded to its limit with spare folding desks.^[8] What a time that was, to be sure!"

“Isn’t all that what you described in that book of yours, *Nancy Meets a Nazi*?” Ruey asked, having been privileged to read the said book the previous weekend.

Joey nodded. “That was it. Turn right here, folk, and keep together. We don’t want to have to wait for stragglers. This part’s easy, but it gets harder further up. I want to keep going till we get to the shelf where the cave is. We’ll feed when we get there and then we can tuck the baskets and so on among the bushes and go and explore the cave. Roger, you keep with me. Come on, Chas! I’ll have you on my other side—as long as we can go in a bunch, that is. Later, it means single file. En avant, mes petits!”

Chapter VIII

THE CAVE

As Joey had said, the first part of the way was easy enough. As they went, Margot was moved to lift up a pleasant little voice in the old shanty, *Whip Jamboree*. Everyone knew it and they all joined in. It certainly helped them to go forward at a good pace and when it was finished, Roddy struck up *The British Grenadiers* and they all “Tow-row-row-rowed” at the tops of their voices till Joey said with mock severity that it was as well the place seemed deserted. Not, as her family hastened to point out to her, that she could say anything. She had joined in with as much vim as anyone. It was the first time the Richardson trio had heard her sing and Ruey and Roger, at any rate, were nearly stunned by the beauty of her golden notes. They were not to know yet that for many years she had been the school’s prima donna. Her voice had ripened over the years. It had lost the chorister touch which had once been one of its chief lovelinesses, but it had gained immeasurably in roundness and sweetness. When the song was over and before anyone could think of another, Ruey spoke up in awed tones.

“Mrs. Maynard, are you a concert singer, as well as a writer?”

“Not I! I’ve never had time for it and anyway, I’m horribly out of practice now.”

“Won’t you sing, just by yourself, to let us hear?” Ruey persisted. “You’ve got a simply *smashing* voice!”

“Oh, I hope not!” Joey’s tones were as bland as cream. “I should hate to think my voice could be described as *destructive*!”

“Sarcasm!” Len cried, as Ruey subsided with scarlet cheeks. “You let it alone and sing as Ruey says. We all know what you think of *that* word!”

“Sing that *Brittany* thing we love so,” Con coaxed. “It’s ages since we’ve heard you really sing and it’s one of the duckiest of your songs.”

Joey chuckled. “Sorry, Ruey, but I honestly do hate that word. It doesn’t even make sense! Slang is all very well and a lot of it is really expressive, but there’s no need to use ugly, senseless words. As for you, Len,” she swung round on that young lady, “who gave you leave to cheek me like that, you brat? All right! I’ll sing *Brittany* if nothing else will satisfy you; but I warn you that’s all. I came out for a picnic—not to give a recital.”

Forthwith, she opened her mouth and, as they climbed upwards, sang the song composed by a young Englishman who had fallen at the front during the first world war as she told them when the last sweet note had died away.

“It’s gorgeous! I never heard it before. Who wrote the words?” Ruey asked.

“E. V. Lucas, who wrote a good deal of verse as well as travel books, essays and novels. Now stop talking, all of you, and save your breath for what’s coming. I have to warn you that *that*,” she waved her hand towards what looked like a good-sized goat-track, “is the next part of our tramp!”

The Richardsons eyed it in some alarm. So far, they had done no real climbing.

“Up there?” Ruey gasped. “But—can we?”

“Why not? It’s steepish, but it’s quite a good path. I’ve done it at least a dozen times in my earlier days. Use your alpenstocks, my children. That’s why you brought them. Come on!” And she set off up the path, springing upwards at a pace that tried the tyros more than a little.

“Don’t look for short cuts. There aren’t any!” she warned them after the first few yards of the way. “The only way is to stick to it.”

They stuck to it, the experienced Maynards making little ado about it, even small Charles scrambling up with catlike ease. Ruey found herself growing breathless, however, and both she and her brothers had aching shins by the time they were halfway up. None of them were going to be beaten by two younger boys, though, and they stuck to it grimly and finally reached a narrow shelf on which pines grew. The road was easier here, and Joey slackened the pace a little with an eye to Roger’s needs.

“Leg all right?” she contrived to murmur to him in a tone that no one else heard.

“I’m O.K.,” he said briefly.

“Good! Because we still have the worst part of it to come. That takes only a few minutes each and once it’s over, the rest is easy. And, as I said before, we may find that that’s been altered. I couldn’t say, it’s such years since I was last here.”

Presently, they came out to the bare limestone, with only tufts of coarse grass growing here and there. It was easy enough on a day like this, but Roger, as he mounted, thought that on a wet day it would be like going on ice. Finally, they came to the foot of an enormous boulder which seemed to block any further progress. Here, Joey halted them.

“Here’s the really sticky part. We have to get up here. It isn’t too bad, for there are footholds and handholds in the rock, but I’ll own it’s a bit of a teaser. Len, you go first. When you get there, Con or Margot can come after you and then you can haul up the impediments before the rest of us do it. Off you go!”

Len stood a moment, looking carefully at the boulder. Then she set off, climbing, as Ruey said later, like a mountain goat. In two minutes, she was past the obstacle and Margot, who was nearest, was going after her. When they were up, they took off the stout leather belts that belted their frocks, fastened them together and let them down and the next few minutes were filled with fastening the bags and baskets to the belts that the pair might draw them up. When the last had gone, Joey nodded to Stephen and he followed his sisters easily. Charles came next and after him, Roddy scrambled up, arriving safely. Joey nodded and then turned to Roger who had spent the time examining the face of the boulder carefully.

“Think you can manage?” she asked. “The girls have dropped the belt and Roddy’s there to help them. Grip it to give you some handhold. It isn’t too bad, you know. You’d make nothing of it if you hadn’t a gammy leg.”

Roger gave her a grin as he advanced to the foot of the rock. Len, lying flat on her face above him, proceeded to issue orders.

“Keep to the right, Roger—the *right*, I said, idiot! There’s a widish crevice there you can get a toe in. Now stretch up and you’ll feel another for your fingers. Hang on to the belt. Roddy and I are gripping it good and hearty. Feel with your toes and there’s a place where the rock sticks out. Got it? O.K. Stretch your hand up and Rod’ll grab it—sailor’s grip to be safe. Got it!” As Roger, clinging with toes and fingernails and, as he said later, very nearly his teeth, stretched up a blindly waving hand which Roddy, on the watch, clutched in a firm grip of fingertips hooked on fingertips. “Now,” she continued, “let go the belt and hold up your other hand. It’s all right. Con has the belt. Now, *heave!*”

Between them, she and Roddy literally heaved Roger up the last yard or so of the way and he sprawled, breathless, but safe and with the bad leg unharmed, at the top of the boulder. Only Joey and Ruey were left below. Joey turned to the girl.

“See how he went, Ruey? Use the belt, and you’ll do it. I’ll steady this end of it. *Hup* you go!”

Thus challenged Ruey, who had been watching the combined antics which had got her brother safely to the top, set her teeth, gripped the belt and went up with an agility she had not known she possessed. Only Joey was left and she disdained the help of the belts. With a squirm, a twist, a wriggle and by dint of using her very long legs and arms, she scrambled up as easily as her family had done and landed among them, slightly breathless, but shamelessly triumphant.

“Who says I’m getting middle-aged?” she demanded as she stood up and pulled her frock into order with fingers which held something of the French gift of adjustment. “That’s the worst over and it isn’t anything like so bad getting down. Now come on! I’m famished and I want something to eat. Up to the left and through the clump of pines. There’s a nice, grassy patch there and a clump or two of rocks we use as back-rests.” Then, as the girls and the three younger boys picked up the impediments, to quote herself, she moved across to where Roger was getting his breath and murmured in an undertone, “Leg all right?”

He nodded. “Quite O.K., ta! It’s all healed, anyhow. Don’t fuss about me!”

She gave him an understanding grin and slid a hand through his arm. “Come on! I don’t know about you, but I want a long, cool drink and a good meal. Luckily, we haven’t far to go now.”

They soon reached the place. Half-a-dozen pine trees grew in a clump and nearby there was a patch of grass and thyme which scented the air, mingling pleasantly with the pungent smell of generations of pine-needles. Everyone sat down with sighs of relief beside one of the small families of rocks and boulders which were strewn here and there. It had been quite a walk and they were tired after their efforts at the big boulder. They unpacked the baskets and boxes which Anna had seen to for them.

“Well,” Margot remarked as she surveyed the riches laid out before them, “Anna has certainly done us proud this time!”

She had! One basket contained a double layer of little meat pies—three each—with a luscious mixture of veal and chicken embedded in rich jelly nestling in the flaky pastry that melted in one’s mouth. There were lettuce sandwiches to eat with them and when they were done, a second basket yielded up a treasure of ripe, juicy apricots. By the time they had finished eating, they were thankful to find a little spring and wash hands and faces clear of stickiness. They had washed all this down with more of the lemonade and by the time they were all finished and clean again, no one had anything to say against Joey’s edict that they should spend the next half-hour resting. It was very hot, out in the sun; but where they were, the rocks gave a pleasant shade and hot though it was, the air was inspiring.

The triplets and Ruey curled up in one sociable group. Roddy, Stephen and Charles made another and Roddy and Charles frankly fell asleep. Roger was lying on his back in an attitude that suggested he had over-eaten himself. Joey had coiled her long legs under her, leaned her shoulders against a sun-warmed rock and was engaged in working out the plot of a new novel. The idea had occurred to her as they were all scrambling up the boulder and now she was well away.

It was at this moment that the sound of men’s voices came to them from beyond the great curve of the mountain and two minutes later, two men appeared. They halted at sight of the party and Len vowed later that they looked completely taken aback.

"I'm positive they never expected to find anyone, and least of all, us, there!" she insisted. "And was the ginger one mad!"

"The ginger one" was a stocky fellow with sandy hair, bushy eyebrows and a jaw that a bulldog might have envied. The other was much the same height, but slim and dark with a head like a well-polished boot-button. He was a handsome fellow, but Con, when it was over, announced that he looked "sinister." As Con had an imagination second to none, the rest all hooted at her, though Joey, on second thoughts was of the opinion that there was something cruel in the keen black eyes which had swept the group, and the well-cut mouth with its thin lips. Both parties took stock of each other before the strangers moved on, the dark man raising the Tirolean hat he wore with exaggerated deference to Joey as he passed her.

Not to be outdone, she bowed slightly, giving him the pretty old Tirolean greeting "Gruss Gott!" The pair then tramped on out of sight. But their coming had broken up the peace of the party. Joey proposed that they should dump the baskets and so on in a cache among the bushes and go to visit the cave and no one objected. First, however, with an eye to the fact that this was August and storms can come up with stunning suddenness in the Alps, she moved over to the edge of the shelf to scan the horizon as far as she could. There was no sign of thunder or, which she feared even more, mist. Far below, they could see the blue waters of the Tiernsee shimmering in the heat of the early afternoon. Beyond it were the great peaks of the Bärenbadalpe, with the Bärenkopf and the mighty Sonnjoch further to the north.

Ruey came to join her and gazed, awestricken, at the giants. "Can we ever climb any of them?" she asked.

"The Bärenbad, any time you like. It's perfectly easy and halfway to the summit there's a Gasthaus where you can eat wild strawberries and cream," Joey replied cheerfully. "The Sonnjoch, you'll have to wait for, until we can make up a party with professional guides. As for the Bärenkopf, I've never been up there myself. It's lower, but it's also a very nasty climb, I believe, even for skilled Alpinists. Anyhow, so far as it's concerned, we're staying below. *I'm* not having any of your broken necks on *my* chest, I can tell you!"—which remarkable statement sent Ruey into a fit of wild giggles.

Satisfied that, so far as anyone could tell, the weather seemed settled, Joey called her party together, and moved off with them to the eastward slope of the mountain. They had to make a detour about a big outcrop of limestone, but when they were round it, they came to more grass and bushes of alpenroses and thorns. Here, she stopped them. "This is the place. Let's get rid of our burdens first. Shove those baskets and boxes well into the middle of that tangle of bushes. It's the only real big one, so we can't forget it. Right under, please, Roger. I don't suppose anyone else is likely to appear on the scene, but at the same time, we'll be safe before we're sorry. Our tea is in those boxes, let me remind you!"

The boys obligingly shoved everything right out of sight, pricking themselves liberally; but when they had finished, Ruey and the triplets took a walk round the big clump and announced that not a thing was to be seen.

"Then *that's* all right! Got your torches, people? How many?" She counted quickly. "Mine—and Roger's and Roddy's and Steve's. Didn't you bring one, Chas? Well, why not? Oh, well, we'll have plenty without. I hope you all saw to your batteries before you came? You did? Then come on!" And switching on the giant torch she had produced from her rucksack, she led the way to a cleft where a bush of alpenroses were strongly rooted inside a long, narrow cleft in the mountain wall. Here, she paused.

“This is the way in. It means single file at first. The path is pretty narrow. I’ll lead and the rest of you follow. Use your torches, but once we’ve gone round the curve, we oughtn’t to need them. There used to be clefts and cracks further along and I don’t suppose they’ve closed up, even after all these years. Chas, you come next to me. Roger, play sheepdog, will you? Not that there’s much chance of straying, but *someone* has to tail off. Now come on, all of you! I’m as excited as you are. I haven’t been here since that awful time when we had to be on the run and I’m dying to see what’s happened since. I do hope no one has interfered with anything!”

With this, she wriggled through the cleft, not without difficulty. Joey who, as a girl had been “all skin and grief,” to quote her sister, had rounded out in these later years, though even now, no one could describe her as “fat.” She managed it and the rest followed, the girls and three younger boys without much trouble. Roger, who possessed the broad shoulders of the Rugger man, had a little squirming to do, but he was through at last, holding up his torch to shed what light he could on the rear of the procession, while Joey did the same for the van and the rest switched on their small pocket torches so that between them, they had quite a good illumination.

The way was over living rock and Joey called back once or twice to warn her followers of a snag in the path. Then they swung round the curve and here she insisted on their switching off their torches. At intervals, a greyish light filtered through from outside and once their eyes were accustomed to it, they could see well enough. It seemed quite a long walk to everyone, but at last Joey called a halt and once more, her torch lit up the scene. They were standing at the threshold of a natural arch and when they filed through, turning on their torches as they went, they found themselves standing in a wide space that seemed to have walls that towered up to be lost in a thick gloom. The floor was fairly level, but at one end stood a low, flattish cairn of stones. Joey turned her light on it.

“This is our cave,” she said, her voice echoing weirdly through the space. “That cairn is, we all felt sure, what was used as an altar by fleeing priests. There used to be an entrance among the bushes close by where we came in, and a path from there comes out under the altar of the church at Spärtz. That’s how we escaped when we were set on by young Nazi hooligans for trying to defend poor little Herr Goldmann. He was a Jew, you know, and they mobbed him. Robin was the first to rush to his aid, but the rest of us followed.” She suddenly gave an uncontrollable shudder as she remembered the horrible incident. “The only wonder was that all of us came out of it more or less safely. All but Herr Goldmann, that is. Vater Johann the parish priest got us into the church and once the door was bolted and barred, it gave us a respite. You’ll see why when I take you down to see it. He was shot by the mob later, and the brutes went to the Goldmanns’ house and killed both him and his wife. We had to run for it—but my family know all about it and later on, I used parts of it in *Nancy Meets a Nazi*. If you want to know the story, you can read that.”

“Is there only the one opening?” Roger asked, looking round with interest.

“No; or Rob and Hilary, who were trapped by a little blighter of a Nazi kid, Hermann Eisen, might have been there yet. You remember I told you about our Peace League the other night. Well, we wanted to hide the paper somewhere safe and we thought of this. Robin had found the cave when she and I were out picknicking some months before. We thought if we tucked it among those stones,” she nodded at the cairn, “it wasn’t likely to be found.”

“But why did you want to hide it?” Roddy asked.

“Because a lot of the girls who had signed it were Austrian or German and if Hitler and Co. had got hold of it, it would have meant a very sticky time for them and their people. Thanks to young Hermann, we had to take it back with us. Miss Annnersley, our present Head, still has it locked up in the school safe.” She paused before she added with sadness in her lovely voice, “It is very precious to us, for many of the girls whose signatures are on it died during the next years.”

The boys fidgeted, but Len slipped a froggy paw into her mother’s. “But more, far more, are still alive,” she said consolingly. “And the others are happy. Don’t feel sad, Mamma.”

But Joey had been distracted already by her daughter’s frigid fingers. “Mercy, Len, how cold you are! I was forgetting. Come along, all of you! I’ve shown you our cave, and now let’s get back to the sunshine and warm you all up or you’ll all be down with chills and a nice ending *that* would be to our picnic, wouldn’t it? Roger, lead the way, will you? Go at a good pace and let’s get some warmth into our bones!”

But when, after going down the dark path at a rattling pace, they reached the opening and came out on to the shelf once more, they found there was not to be much warmth for them. The sun was still shining as they fished out their belongings from the bushes and then sat down for a cup of the coffee Anna had provided for the afternoon meal. But when she had finished hers, Joey strolled over to the edge of the shelf. What she saw below, had the effect of sending her tearing back to where the party were beginning to unpack the baskets.

“Pack up and come on *at once!*” she commanded. “*Quick!* There’s not a moment to be lost!”

“Why?” Margot began as the rest bestirred themselves and shoved everything pell-mell, back into the baskets and boxes.

Joey replied with outflung hand and one word. “*Mist!*”

Chapter IX

ADVENTURE IN THE MIST

The Maynard family needed no more. They had not lived for so long in the Alps not to know what mist there could be like. Their urgency infected the more ignorant Richardsons and in three minutes' time everything had been repacked, the burdens shouldered, and they were all heading across the shelf and taking the path downwards.

The mist was not very far up at present. All they could see were thin rags of it floating about the trees much further down; but the Maynards all knew the horrifying speed with which it could move. Margot and Len closed on Ruey and Con paired off with Roddy. Joey had beckoned small Charles to her side and Roger and Stephen tailed them off. Joey was mainly concerned with getting the crowd down to the Sonnalpe shelf before the limestone could become wet and therefore slippery. If it proved to be really thick by the time they got there, she knew they could beg shelter almost anywhere in the little community. From there, it would also be possible to ring up Die Blumen so that Anna and Rösli need not worry and they could take a message for her husband if he turned up that evening. She kept them going at a cracking pace and much sooner than anyone had expected it, they had reached the big boulder. Here, she stopped after a quick glance downwards where the mist-wraiths seemed to be gathering and thickening.

"Listen!" she said sharply. "Don't interrupt and don't argue. There isn't time. I'm putting you all over the boulder as fast as I can. Once we're down, we must keep all together and hold on to each other. It's easy to lose touch in a mist. Leave all the baskets and so on up here under that clump of bushes. They must take their chance. Roddy, you go first. It's easy enough. Swing yourself over by your hands. Now feel to the right with your foot for a crevice. Got it? There's another a little below your left hand. Shift your fingers into it. I've got hold of your other wrist so you can't fall. Good! Grip tight and feel for another hold with your right hand—and this is where I'll have to let go," she added in a rather different tone. She was hanging over at a perilous angle and if it had not been for the triplets who had flung themselves down to grip her ankles, she felt as if she might have gone over headfirst. As it was, Roddy quickly got his grip, as she wriggled back cautiously out of danger.

"You next, Len," was all she said, however.

Len needed no hints. She went down with a skill that reminded her mother of an ambition she had once uttered to be a member of the Alpine Club when she was old enough. She reached the lower path almost as soon as Roddy and then Joey sent Stephen to join them. Charles came next and he was as agile as his sister.

"Stand to the side, Chas," his mother shouted down. "Now, Ruey! You next!"

Inwardly, Ruey was afraid. She had not minded the upward climb very much, but she was scared of the downward one. However, Joey gave her no time to think. With strong hands, she swung the girl over the boulder, gripping her wrist until Ruey had found the foot and handholds. Then she released her with a curt, "Hurry! We've no time for dithering!" Ruey set her teeth and did her best at it. She missed one hold halfway down, and slithered ignominiously to the bottom, tearing her frock clean across the skirt. Roddy and Len were there to catch her, however, and she landed more or less on her own feet.

“You next, Roger!” Then, as he hesitated, Joey added impatiently, “The girls and I are accustomed to scrambling about and you aren’t. Go on!”

For reply, he went over the top, found the holds and then yelled, “Stand out from under!” and disdaining any more help, dropped the rest of the way, landing with professional ease at the bottom, his knees bent and his whole frame slack.

Joey’s heart was in her mouth as she remembered his leg, but Roger was a keen gymnast and he knew what he was doing. He was upright in a moment and shouting to her and the girls to hurry up.

Joey sent Margot and Con down and followed them herself with more agility than grace, landing, among the assembled group anxiously watching her, on her own feet, it is true, but with a stagger that nearly sent Margot who was nearest, flying.

There was no time to wait. Joey and Margot recovered their balance and the former had the party on the march at once. So far, the mist had seemed more or less stationary but now little curls were floating up towards the trees they must pass between and already Joey had realised that she was going to need every scrap of knowledge of the terrain she possessed if she were to get them even as far as the Sonnalpe safely—unless, of course, the mist stopped rising. Even so, it would be a tricky job.

“Link up!” she ordered them, as she caught at Charles’s hand. “Hang on to my skirt, Ruey. Len you hold Ruey’s, and Margot hold Len’s; Con on to Margot and Stephen and Roger last. Don’t any of you lose touch for pity’s sake! Come on—and watch your feet for snags and roots! Roddy, take Charles’s other hand.”

They plunged downwards towards the pines and by the time she had got them safely off the limestone, their leader was beginning to breathe rather more freely. Wet limestone is one of the most slippery things to walk over and she wanted no accidents. But by this time, the mist had reached the trees. It was thin as yet, and they could see their way clearly, but Joey needed no one to tell her that it was thickening with every minute. She remembered the great mist which had shrouded all the countryside during that long night and day when they had first made their escape from the Nazis and she shuddered inwardly as she thought of being held up on a shelterless mountain-slope with a set of children—for even Roger was only sixteen.

“I’ll never go near that cave again as long as I live if we only get safely out of this!” she vowed inwardly as she hurried them on as fast as she could. “It evidently has a real hate at me!”

Once they were through the trees, there was only the goat-track to negotiate and then they would be on the regular mountain-path and not far from the Sonnalpe village. Joey’s heart grew lighter as they went along the little wooded shelf.

She rejoiced too soon. It was at this point that Roddy, keeping his eyes glued to the path before his feet, failed to notice the out-stretched arm of a pine tree. He walked straight into it and the blow he got made him lose his footing. He went down with a crash and a yell, dragging Charles who still clutched his hand, with him. Joey followed and by the time the entire party were on their feet again, the fog had suddenly closed in on them and they were standing huddled together in a thick, impenetrable cloud.

“Here’s a nice state of things!” Joey ejaculated. “Anyone got a compass?”

Stephen had; but in passing it over, he dropped it and though they scabbled for a moment or two, there was no finding it and Joey dared not let anyone move out of touch. When Roger shuffled to one side, she called him sharply to order.

“Stop where you are! It’s gone and that’s that! But I’m not having one of you wandering off in this, not for all the tea in China! Get *that* into your heads! Steve! You really are a complete ass! Now let me see,” as the repentant Stephen made no reply—he had none he could make—but merely tried to huddle down behind his eldest sister and Roger. “First of all, put on your macs and hurry up about it.”

They all struggled into the plastic raincoats. They gave no warmth, but they would be a protection from the damp. By the time she had finished buttoning up Charles in his, she had made up her mind what to do.

“Listen, folk,” she said. “I’ve no idea when this will end. Mists have been known to go on for days at a time and we can’t just park ourselves here. We were going down, so we’ll keep on going down. Luckily, there aren’t any precipices or things like that round about. The worst that can happen to anyone is to slip and slide down to the Sonnalpe shelf and that’s broad enough, goodness knows! Link up again and keep on following me. Len, you and Ruey take Chas between you. I want my hands free. Here he is. Don’t move till you’ve got him and then Len hang on to my skirt. Ready? All linked up? Then come on, and for pity’s sake tread carefully!”

They moved off and much more slowly than before. For one thing, Joey had to feel every step of the way now. Despite her saying that there were no precipices, as she very well knew, there might be sudden dips in the surface and she wanted to avoid an accident if she could. For another, they were not exactly fresh and the damp, clammy cold was not exactly reviving. Furthermore, the stillness that came with the fog was frightening to anyone with an imagination. Even their own tones when they spoke were muffled. Aware of this, she kept their talk to the minimum. She was also thinking that it would do no one any good to swallow much mist.

What neither she nor anyone else realised just then was that that tumble of Roddy’s had flung them out of the right path. They were going down, it is true, but they had gone past the track that led to the Sonnalpe and were making steadily to the north-west instead of going due west. It dawned on Joey when they had been walking between the trees for what seemed like hours that it was time they had reached the fork in the path. Half-guessing what had happened, she halted her band.

“We ought to be either at the fork in the path or near it,” she said. “Girls, take off your belts and buckle them together. Don’t make a step one way or the other while you do it. Just stand still and do it.”

It was quickly done and Len handed her the finished result. She grimaced to herself in the dimness as she saw how short it was for what she wanted to do, but at that moment, Steve came to the rescue. He lugged a length of cord from a pocket and handed it over. Even when that had been tied to one end of the improvised rope, his mother knew that it would give her very little way for investigating. However it was all they could do. Thrusting one end into Len’s hand and bidding her keep tightly hold of it, Joey took the other, switched on her torch and went forward as far as she could to see what she could find out. It did not take her long to learn that they had missed the Sonnalpe altogether and must be well off to the north of it. In the circumstances, she dared not go back. The only thing to do was to go on and trust that they really were going downhill all the time and not walking round in circles.

“We’ve got to go on,” she said as cheerfully as she could. “The only thing is that we must make sure we don’t go round in rings as people are apt to do when they can’t see their road. It’s a pity we haven’t a Scotsman here. I understand they can literally *smell* the north!”

"Mummy was Scots," Ruey said. "I can't do that sort of thing myself; at least, I don't think so. Roger, what about you or Roddy?"

"Not me," Roddy said with brief simplicity.

"I can—a bit," Roger put in. "Half a sec!"

They waited breathlessly until he said, "I think we're O.K. so far. Do you want us to go north, Mrs. Maynard?"

"Yes!" Joey replied fervently. "Go north and keep north. That way, we'll be there in time, though it's bound to take us a while longer yet. What's that, Len?"

"Only that I kept my knapsack on and I've a flask of coffee in it," Len said, easing herself out of the straps as she spoke. "We'll have to use the top for a cup, but it 'ud give us a mouthful of hot drink each. Shall we have it before we go any further?"

"Good idea! Yes; we will. Keep on standing still, all of you. Len, give that flask to me. Now be ready to take the cup when I say."

Luckily, Len had elected to pack a two-pint flask into her knapsack and the coffee, when it came, was steaming hot still. In fact, they burnt their lips on the rim of the cup. No one complained, however. They were too thankful for the heat of the drink. Joey had meant to leave all there was for the children. Then she remembered that she probably had as much need of it as they and she was the leader of the expedition. She took her share along with the rest and then the flask was handed back to Len who repacked it as quickly as she could and slipped her arms through the straps to wriggle the knapsack into place on her back.

"Wish I'd thought of doing that!" Margot murmured to Ruey as they took up their stations once more and set off again, this time with Roger in the lead.

"Len does think of things, doesn't she?" Ruey replied.

Margot nodded vigorously. "Always has done. Mother says it's the result of being the eldest—though she isn't all that much the eldest," she added in tones that sounded resentful.

"D'you think that's really it?" Ruey asked thoughtfully. "I mean, Roger's the eldest of our lot and I generally have to run round after him with things."

"Oh, well, he's a *boy*!" Margot returned. "Boys never do think of things—not if our lot are anything to go by."

"Girls! Stop talking!" Joey called at this juncture. "You don't want to swallow any more of this ghastly fog than you need."

The pair fell silent and they went on without any more chatter for the moment.

Down, and down, and down! It seemed to be never-ending. Joey was beginning to grow very anxious. She was wearying herself and her back and legs were aching. She could imagine what it must be for the younger members of the party. Not Stephen, perhaps; nor Roddy. Both were sturdy boys and Stephen, at any rate, was accustomed to climbing and walking. But it was an ordeal for small Charles who never seemed quite so robust as the others. Ruey, too, all untrained as she was, must be feeling the strain of that long descent, though no whimper or complaint came from either her or Charles.

As if she sensed something of what her mother was feeling, Len shouted to her.

"I say! I think we're getting somewhere at last! I'm positive this is a proper path we're going on. It has that feel."

Instantly, everyone else also felt it and began to cheer up. Joey herself swung a foot across from side to side and was rewarded by finding that she was kicking against something on the left hand. It *might* be just a tree trunk of course! She stretched out her free hand and groped

about. The next moment, a positive yell of triumph broke from her, startling the others into coming to a dead stop.

"There's a fence here! Feel for it—on the left! Len's right; we've got somewhere at last! Now be careful, all of you. We don't want to end in the lake."

Con, who had remained silent throughout that lengthy walk, suddenly sniffed loudly. "We're near it," she announced. "I can smell the water. Listen! There's a clock chiming! Where *ever* have we got to?"

"St. Scholastika's!" Margot shouted. "That's St. Scholastika's church clock! We've come right along the mountain to the foot of the lake! If you ask me, I'd say we're on the wrong side of the fence along the road—between the slope and the lake-road, I mean. Well, it's bound to be that! The fence is on the *left*-hand side."

As if to confirm her statement, the warning hoot of the lake-steamer sounded at that instant. She was turning in to the landing-stage at St. Scholastika's, the village at the foot of the lake where the little Tiern river emerged to go racing headlong down to join the great Inn. They must be very near for the hoot to sound so clearly through the mist.

"Over the fence with you!" Joey cried. "Keep to it, though. If we hurry, we may catch the ferry home to Buchau. Then hot baths and bed for everyone. Supper on trays, once you're in bed. Come on!"

Charles was lifted over by Roger. The others scrambled across and just as they were about to make for the landing-stage with all the haste they dared, Len shrieked excitedly, "It's lifting—the mist's lifting! Look how much thinner it is! And here comes the sun!"

She was right. The mist, having been beaten by the adventurers, seemed to be giving it up as a bad job. Already, it was thinning rapidly about the road and the mountain slopes, though it still remained heavy over the lake. The rays of the evening sun came sloping down from the west, striking warmly on the soaked and chilled party, though he himself remained hidden by the lake fog. Joey swung round in the opposite direction.

"Come on, everyone! We walk—and as fast as we can go! Much faster than waiting until the steamer gets to Buchau! By the time it arrives, we shall be wallowing in hot baths with any luck. Take my hand, Chas, and come along! Off you go, folks! This beastly fog is clearing rapidly, thank goodness. Why, I can see a good five yards ahead now! Heaven send," she added piously as she surveyed the drowned rats standing about her, "that we don't meet anyone on the way! Get on with it!"

With one accord they set off as hard as they could go. Tired or not, those hot baths she had mentioned were a powerful magnet to draw them to Die Blumen. The girls, Roddy and Stephen went at a run. Roger waited to help her with Charles who looked very white and all eyes. Poor little man! He had been very brave, but the thought that home and his comfortable bed were so near ended that and it was all he could do not to break down and cry with tiredness and cold.

Joey knew all about it, of course. She gave him a quick look and said, "Tuck your hands through our arms, Chas! You'll soon be warmer, walking at the rate we shall go, and it's better for you than being carried if you can keep going."

Between them, they dragged him along at a good round pace, but by the time they had passed the big Seehof hotel halfway between St. Scholastika's and Die Blumen, he was completely finished. Roger stooped down and made a back.

"Come on!" he said briefly. "Piggy-back the rest of the way for you, my lad!"

Joey said nothing. She helped Charles to mount his steed and then she and Roger hurried on and finally reached Die Blumen to be greeted by Anna who lifted Charles down and carried him off, saying as she went, “Hot coffee in the Saal, and Ruey and Margot and Con are already in the bath. Rösli is filling bottles and the babies are well and fast asleep, meine Dame. Come with thy Anna, mein Kind, and she will bath thee in the kitchen and give thee hot milk. Then bed and a long sleep and in the morning, thou wilt be well and fresh again.”

“Thank goodness for Anna!” Joey said wearily as she and Roger turned into the Saal where steaming hot coffee presided over by Len and the other two boys awaited them. Len poured it out while Roddy, prompted thereto by her, helped Joey out of her dripping raincoat and carried it off to the kitchen where Anna already had Charles in the biggest washtub, soaking the aches out of his bones in the steaming water with which it was filled. As he went back to the Saal, a yell from Margot announced that her bath was vacated and Joey sent Stephen off at once. Ruey and Con screamed a moment later and by the time she and Roger had finished their coffee, baths were waiting for them and Len was quitting hers, looking like a boiled lobster. St. Scholastika’s having been built originally as a school had an outsize in boilers and when Anna had seen the mist, she and Rösli had turned to and filled it up and the result was hot water for everyone. By nine o’clock, the whole party of picnickers were tucked up in warm beds, having demolished trays of hot soup, hot meat and vegetables and baked custard, and Joey was the only one to be awake.

Anna came to assure her that all seemed to be well. Even Charles was sleeping peacefully and the colour was rapidly returning to his face.

“And now, meine Dame,” she concluded, “all is well. Rösli, I have sent to bed, and I will lock up and give the babies their last bottles and then to bed I also go.”

“Thank you more than I can say, Anna,” Joey returned. “Don’t get up early tomorrow, for I’m going to leave everyone to have their sleep out and no one will want breakfast till all hours. So have a good rest yourself.”

Anna eyed her mistress thoughtfully. She departed without another word, but returned in five minutes with a steaming glass which she presented to Joey firmly.

“Oh, *no!*” that lady protested as her nose told her what it was. “I loathe spirits, and well you know it!”

“But drink it, meine Dame, or I must phone the Herr Doktor. It is but a little Schnäppschen and may save you a rheum in the nose.”

“Tyrant!” Joey retorted. But she drank it for she knew her Anna.

When Anna, every chore finished, was taking her weary bones off to bed, she peeped into the big white bedroom on her way to her own. She had no need for further worry. Joey was sleeping as peacefully as anyone. In fact, to be quite honest, she was *snoring!*

Chapter X

THE PROFESSOR SPRINGS A MINE

Thanks, in the main, to Anna, no one was a penny the worse next day for their very trying experience on the Sonnalpe. Even Joey escaped without a cold and Charles, who was Anna's darling, fulfilled her prophecy by turning up for breakfast next morning, looking his usual self and prepared to eat a gargantuan meal. Roger's leg had taken no harm and if Ruey had been considerably alarmed during the walk through the mist, she had recovered after a good night's sleep.

A letter came for Joey from the Görnetz Platz. Jack Maynard was not returning until the Monday though he hoped to be with them some time during the day.

"I can't say I'm surprised your father has been held up," Joey remarked to her daughters when she had read his letter aloud to them, "but I must say I never expected it would be the ceiling of the Speisesaal of all things that would do it. If you three had still been in your old room, I should have made inquiries as to how you occupied yourselves at night. As you've all three had your own rooms since the Christmas holidays, however, it can't be your faults. I can only imagine that since the last to sleep there was your Auntie Madge, it must be her added weight that's done it." She paused to smile wickedly and the triplets chortled loudly.

"I wish she could hear you!" Len said with a giggle.

"Oh, I'm telling her so when next I write. Won't she love me, though!"

"Wish I could be a fly on the wall to see the fun when your letter arrives!" Margot observed, her voice full of longing.

"Well, you could always send Josette a card and ask her to send you an account of it," her mother reminded her, still with that wicked look in her dancing eyes.

"So I could!" Margot flung her arms round her mother and hugged her. "You really are a pet of a mother! Let me get in first, though, so that Josette can be on the look-out."

"Oh, I'm not writing till Sunday. Send yours today or tomorrow and it'll arrive at least two days before mine, for I can't post till Monday. Better make it a letter, by the way. You know how they make postcards common property there."

"O.K. We aren't doing anything today, are we?"

"We are *not*! Emphasis on the 'not.' We are taking things easily, my lambs. After you girls have done your usual chores, you can bring your mending out on the lawn behind the house. Boys! You see to your jobs and then fetch your books or any other ploys you like; but no one is doing anything much either this morning or this afternoon. We'll have Kaffee und Kuchen early and if the weather holds, we'll have the boat out this evening and go for a row on the lake. How's that?"

This programme was greeted with loud cheers before they scattered to attend to the various jobs each had to perform. No one had much in the way of mending to do and once it was out of the way, the four girls gathered round the playpen where the two-month-old twins were lying in their baskets, gurgling and chuckling.

"Aren't they sweetie-pies?" Ruey breathed as she hung over the rail of the pen to gaze at them. They were the first tiny babies she had ever had anything to do with and she was thrilled with them.

"They *are* pretty," Con assented. "And it looks as if they weren't going to be anything particular, either."

"What on earth do you mean?" her mother demanded.

"Well, Cecil is very dark—as dark as I am—and Felix and Felicity are just as fair. All of us have been either very dark or very fair, when you come to think of it——"

"You three," Joey reminded her, "were *red*! And you are the only one to have lost the redness. Len's hair is chestnut and Margot's red-gold. But as tiny babies, there wasn't a pin to choose between you. It was only when you were about three that you began to change at all. I was the only one who knew you apart on sight."

Ruey goggled at her friends. "Mercy!" she exclaimed. "What a shock it must have been when you first saw them, Mrs. Maynard!"

Joey considered this a moment. "It was and it wasn't. I must say I was a trifle startled at first, but I quickly realised that I might have expected it."

"Why? I don't see it. After all, you're very dark and Dr. Maynard is fair. I should have thought they'd have been mixed—say, one dark and two fair; or the other way round."

"Red babies very often happen because their parents are opposites in colour," Joey explained. "I can't explain *why*, so don't ask me; but it is so."

"Oh, I see. Well, neither of these two is red. Their hair is fairish and they have blue eyes. What do you think they'll grow into?" Ruey asked with interest.

"More or less their father's colouring. As for their eyes, it's too soon yet to say one way or the other. All babies are born with blue eyes—like kittens and puppies. As they grow older, they may change—or they may remain blue." Then she glanced at the girl. "Want to nurse one, Ruey?"

"Oh, may I? They—they won't mind, will they?"

"Not at this age. Here you are. Here's Geoff for you." And Joey stooped over the basket and scooped out her youngest son and plumped him into the arms eagerly held out for him.

The baby snuggled up to Ruey and fell asleep. She held him gingerly, almost afraid lest he should break in two. Len giggled.

"He won't bite you, and he's quite solid," she said. "So's Phil." And she picked up her tiny sister and cuddled her with an experienced air that impressed her friend deeply.

"By the time these holidays are over," Joey said, lying back in her chair and watching them, "you'll be as accustomed to them as these three are. I'm afraid you'll have to hand them over, girls. Here comes Anna to say that it's bottle time, so they and I must depart for a while. Give me Phil, Len. All right, Anna, we're coming!"

Ruey reluctantly handed over her burden to Anna who took him with a nod and a smile before she went off after her mistress, the baby still sound asleep.

"I never thought babies could be such darlings," she said.

"You wait till you hear them yell," Con advised. "They've got good lungs!"

As it happened, Ruey had never heard this, but later on, when she happened to be about at bath-time, she was awed by the shrieks of indignation that rose from the twins as they were bathed and powdered and made ready for the night.

"It must," she told the triplets, "have been ghastly when it was you three!"

"Not knowing, can't say," Margot retorted insouciantly. "I expect it was. All babies seem to yell their heads off at first when they're washed."

However, that came much later on.

The afternoon was occupied with reading and, in Margot's case, writing the letter to her cousin Josette Russell. Ruey had exclaimed at the pretty name, and the girls had explained that the young lady was named for their mother, but it had been turned into Josette to save muddles.

"I wish you could come to school with us," Con said. "Then you'd get to know Josette. She really is rather a pet!"

"Not so pretty as Sybs, though," Margot put in. "Sybs? She's the eldest girl in the Russell family—Sybil of course. Mother says she's the pick of us all for looks. Not that Josette isn't pretty, too."

"Or Ailie—she's the youngest girl," Margot put in.

"She's a young demon for mischief. Auntie Madge was so disappointed. She'd wanted *one* girl who would be gentle and sweet. Neither Sybs nor Josette could ever be described that way and she did so hope Ailie would be it. But she isn't."

"Are they near your age, any of them?" Ruey asked, wishing inwardly that she herself was not so destitute of relations.

"Josette is," Con told her. "She's not quite two years older than we are. Sybs is almost grown-up. Ailie is three years younger. She's at school, too. Yes, Ruey, it really would be nice if you came to school with us, as I said before. Why don't you ask your father to let you?"

"I don't suppose he'd want to be bothered with making a change," Ruey replied, though she had been wishing that she *could* go to the Chalet School.

"Well, ask him," Len advised. "After all, he can't eat you. He can only say yes or no as the fit takes him. I'd have a go at it if I were you, anyhow."

Ruey laughed and said no more and the subject dropped. In any case, Joey arrived at that moment with a sheaf of typescript and an offer to read the new book as far as it had gone and see what they thought of it.

"Oh, goody!" Margot cried. "We'll play dog all right! Sit down and begin."

"It's a girls' school story, isn't it?" Len asked. "What about the boys?"

"As it happens, it isn't. It's an adventure story—situated in the Black Mountains on the Welsh border. There are boys as well as girls in it and I'm hoping it'll appeal to both sexes. That's why I want to try it on the dog," Joey explained.

Thereafter, they spent a joyous hour. Joey began with an adventure, and that led to another which was more exciting than the one before it. She had written only six chapters, but she stopped abruptly when she had read the third and insisted that they must have Kaffee und Kuchen now, and then every one was to go and tidy up before they went out on the lake.

"It's going to be a glorious evening and there'll be dozens of boating parties besides ourselves," she pointed out. "I'm taking no horde of tatterdemalions with me, I can tell you! Shorts and clean shirts, please. Safer, if anyone goes overboard. Bring your sun-glasses when you come. There'll be enough glare on the water to cause sun-dazzle and we don't want to go barging into other people because we can't see properly."

The result was that when they clambered into the broad, steady tub which was kept for family parties, though Jack Maynard possessed a racing skiff and a canoe as well, it was a very trim and suitably attired crowd that finally settled down with Stephen as cox and Joey and the Richardson boys as rowers.

Joey herself was as dainty as the rest in a cotton frock of her favourite jade-green and big shady hat lined with matching silk and a twist of the same round the crown. Ruey frankly gaped when she saw this.

“Isn’t that the same hat your mother wore last week with pleated pink lining and a wreath of roses?” she asked Margot who was crowded down beside her.

Margot giggled. “You’re dead right; it is!” She raised her voice. “Mamma! When you have time, show Ruey your hat, will you?”

Joey echoed the giggle as she replied. “Is she puzzled?”

“Just so’s you’d notice it,” Margot returned while Ruey sat there, crimson from throat to brow and wondering where the joke was.

Joey glanced round as she dipped her oars in the water. “It’s all right, Ruey. Just a little invention of my own. I like my hats and frocks to match, so I made four separate linings, each with clips at either edge and clips on the hat itself. Then, all I have to do is clip on the lining I want. The bands for the crown are also clipped on. One hat does the work of four and I can match up all the time—if you know what I mean by *that*.”

“It’s a brainwave!” Ruey said in awed tones. “And what a saving of cash!”

“Jolly useful if she ever took to crime,” Len added with a grin.

“Well! Of all the nasty things to say!” Joey cried. “*When* have I ever given you reason to think I was possessed of criminal proclivities, may I ask?”

“Oh, never! I only said it would be useful,” Len returned, quite unperturbed.

“This conversation will now cease!” Joey announced. “No good purpose is being served by it that I can see. Stephen, port your helm a little. We’re heading too far down the lake. We want to post Len’s letter before we do anything else.”

Stephen altered his course and they shot out across the lake where they all found that they were thankful for their sun-glasses. The glare was severe, more especially as there was no breeze and the water reflected the late afternoon sunlight with deep intensity. Even their big hats would not have been of much use against that, Ruey reflected.

It was too hot for fast rowing, but Joey set a steady stroke which took them well across the water. Both Roger and Roddy could use their oars, but neither was much of an oarsman, as Mrs. Maynard realised very soon, and she eased them along accordingly.

“Do you row at all, Ruey?” she asked presently, when they were halfway across.

“Not at all,” that young lady replied promptly. “I’d like to learn, though.”

“So you shall when we’re less loaded up. I’ll take you out by yourself and give you a lesson some time next week.” She glanced ahead. “Hi, Steve! Starboard, quick! Oh, lord! It’s too late!” as even with the instant change of course, they were unable to avoid the skiff that had come shooting across from the other side. They didn’t ram her, but the two boats grazed each other heavily and the rower in the skiff lost one oar as a result. Both he and his passenger swore as they pushed the boats apart with a vim that set both rocking violently.

“I’m sorry,” Joey called. “I’ll fetch your oar back pronto!” And she quickened her stroke as they chased the oar which was bobbing merrily along in the current that sweeps down the centre of the lake to veer suddenly to the western shore where what is known as The Dripping Rock stands. From there, the water swings out again to the centre, finally emerging at St. Scholastika’s as the Tiern River. She knew all about that current. Only the summer before, she and Mary-Lou Trelawney had lost an oar and been forced to leave their boat and scramble up the said rock to the path running down to Briesau above its crown, before they could contrive at all to rejoin their friends at the Kron Prinz Karl in Briesau. As this had been late in the evening and a bad thunderstorm was in the offing, it had been quite an adventure and what was more, had resulted in Joey’s getting Die Blumen. But that is another story.^[9]

[9] The Chalet School Comes of Age.

There was no question of that sort this evening. The Maynard crew came up with the oar in half-a-dozen strokes. Len leaned out and caught it and it was taken back to its owners who received it with some coldness. Roger delivered it to them, Joey being engaged in holding the boat steady. A brief word of thanks from the very much annoyed pair and the episode was over.

“And thank goodness for that!” Joey remarked when they were well away. “It wasn’t altogether our fault, for those two idiots should have been looking where they were going. But we should have been doing the same, so I suppose we must share the blame.” She broke off suddenly as Len gave a yell. “Well! What’s bitten you, young Len?”

“Nothing,” Len said, “but isn’t that your father over there on the landing-stage, Ruey? It looks awfully like him.”

With one accord, the three Richardsons stared at the Briesau landing-stage which they were nearing. It took only a moment to tell them that Len was right. Their father stood a little to one side of the crowd waiting for the ferry which was coming steadily up the lake from Gaisalm.

“You’ve said it!” Roger exclaimed. “He’s turned up at last. I’ll give him a hail!” He raised his voice to roar. “Hey, Dad! We’re coming, if it’s us you’re after! Miss that boat! We’ll be with you first.”

“Put your backs into it!” Joey cried, quickening stroke again. “We don’t want to be caught in the steamer’s wash. Yell to your father to get down to the path, Roger. I can’t take us to the landing with the ferry coming along.”

The Professor had heard his son’s bellow and was looking round. Ruey scrambled to her feet, forgetting that she was in a boat and they rocked wildly. Margot grabbed her and pulled her down with a cry of, “You can’t go dickey-dancing all over the place in boats, you idiot! You’ll have us all in the water if you’re not careful!”

The miracle was that they were *not* in, for Ruey, tugged at regardless, lost her footing and fell across Margot and Con who both clutched at her with shrieks of dismay. Luckily, Joey was on the alert and she flung her weight to the other side in time to prevent the worst happening. But Ruey was only just saved from an impromptu bath. However, what with their yells and the people near the shore, the Professor was able to realise that his family was close at hand. He quitted the landing-stage and came along the path to meet them a little way away.

Joey held her tongue for the moment, though she let both Ruey and Margot know all about it later on before they went to bed. She had never bettered her lecture on How to Behave in a Boat, and the pair were very sorry for themselves before she had ended. At the time, she merely thanked her stars that they were in The Tub and not a skittish craft like the skiff. She rowed to where the Professor was standing awaiting them, apparently completely oblivious of the minor sensation his daughter had created.

“Ha! So there you are, you three!” he remarked. “Look here; I want a talk with you—oh, and you, too, Mrs. Maynard. Also your husband. Isn’t he with you?” He scanned the boatload absently and Joey had to frown severely at her family to stop them from giggles.

“Sorry,” she said as Roger steadied the boat and the Professor actually remembered his manners and gave her a hand. “I’m afraid he isn’t. Some business at the Görnetz Platz cropped up and he had to go at once to see to it. He’ll be back on Monday. Can you stay down so long?”

"I'm not going up again," he said. "I've had everything packed and brought down. That's what I wanted to see you all about. I'm going away and I expect to be away sometime—possibly even a year or two. I wondered if you and Dr. Maynard would mind keeping an eye on the children as long as these holidays last? I've written to enter the boys as boarders at their school and to the Head of Ruey's school to ask her to find somewhere for the girl to stay while I'm away. I'm giving up the Croydon house and having the furniture put into store. They couldn't stay there by themselves and I haven't time to hunt someone to take Miss Wotherspoon's place. I expect to be off on Monday."

His own three stared at each other helplessly. This sort of thing had happened before, but then Miss Wotherspoon had been with them so it had made little difference to them. This time, however, it was quite another story. Ruey, when she had recovered from the first shock, flushed angrily and her hazel eyes flashed. So she was to be pushed off on to anyone who would have her as if she were an unwanted puppy! It really was the utter *edge*!

Joey saw the tell-tale signs in her face and guessed what she was feeling. She spoke quickly. "I expect it'll be all right for the boys if there are vacancies for them, but don't you think that in the circumstances it would be better for Ruey to go to boarding-school, too?"

"Oh, I daresay; but, as I've said, I expect to be off by Monday. I've no time to waste in hunting up boarding-schools," he said curtly.

"You don't have to!" Ruey suddenly spoke for herself and her voice was shaking with rage. "I can go to the Chalet School with Len and Con and Margot. I *know* Mrs. Maynard won't mind seeing to the arrangements, even if *you* can't be bothered. And it's no use your writing to the Head. She said before we broke up that she was spending her summer holiday in Kenya, so she just won't get your letter—or not early enough to be of any use to *you*!"

There was bitter resentment in her tones and Joey could scarcely wonder at it. Before she could intervene, however the Professor spoke again.

"Oh, well, if that's what you want and someone else can take the business side of it for me, I'm sure I don't mind. Perhaps *you* will be so kind as to attend to it, Mrs. Maynard? No doubt they could make some arrangements for her holidays as well. I really am terribly pressed for time."

Ruey opened her lips again and goodness only knows what she was going to say. Joey was too quick for her, this time.

"I think we can hardly discuss anything so important in this casual way and in public. You've opened the chalet, haven't you? Then suppose you and I walk back there and talk things over. Roger, take The Tub along to the boathouse over there and leave it in charge of Herr Pfarrer. Then you folk go and have lemonade or what you like at the Kron Prinz Karl. Tell Herr Braun it's on me, Len. I haven't any cash with me, not expecting to need it. Oh, and don't forget to post that letter of yours, Margot. Now come out, all of you, and go to the Post and wait there for Roger. I'll join you at the Kron Prinz Karl, so don't go wandering. Anyhow, I see there's a Zigeuner band there, so you'll have plenty to amuse you. Now, Professor, shall we go and see to this business since you *are* so pressed for time?"

For the life of her, she could not keep sarcasm out of her voice. She was indignant at his treatment of Ruey—of all three, for the matter of that.

"Really," she thought, as she urged him to the path across the rough turf, "they might be a litter of unwanted kittens from the way he handles them! If *this* is what it means to have a Professor for father, thank goodness my crowd have a plain, common or garden doctor like Jack!"

Chapter XI

THE PROFESSOR'S INTENTIONS

"Yes; it's all nicely settled," Joey said, smiling into the anxious hazel eyes Ruey had lifted to her face on the Wednesday following that eventful Friday. "Take that look off your face, Ruey—it doesn't suit your style of beauty at all—and stop worrying for the future."

The anxiety vanished and Ruey gave vent to a wild yell of, "Whoop—eee!" before she turned again to Joey who had covered her ears with her hands, exclaiming, "Spare my eardrums! I'm accustomed to a din, but your yells are worse than awful! Now," she added briskly as a scarlet-faced Ruey stammered her apologies, "what were you going to say just now?"

"I was only going to ask if you and Doc had much bother with Dad?"

"None whatsoever. I think his main feeling was, 'This woman means to go on nattering until I do something about Ruey, so I'd better do it and shut her up.' Anyhow, he ended by agreeing with everything I proposed."

"What, exactly, *have* you proposed?"

"You three are to be left in the legal guardianship of Dr. Jack and myself and we will be your guardians as long as your dad's away. In other words, we see about your education, clothes, holidays, manners and morals—just what we do for our own crowd, in short."

"Oh, I see. Thanks a lot, Mrs. Maynard. That'll be sma—er—*marvellous*! And we can look on Freudesheim as home, as long as Dad's gone?"

"I should hope so! Now, don't you want to go and break the glad news to the rest? I know the girls are aching to hear what's going to happen to you. They'll be overjoyed to hear that you're going to school with them when term begins. Oh, by the way, I think I'd better tell Roger myself. Send him along here to me, will you, before you start in?"

"O.K. And, I say, I'm really frightfully grateful to you for taking it on. I'll do my honest best not to be too much of a curse to you."

Joey laughed. "You'd have your work cut out to do that, my child. I have my own ways of dealing with curses and pests and nuisances, let me tell you! And you'll be really happy about the school?" She watched the mobile little face keenly.

"On the whole—yes. Goodness knows how I'll manage with having to talk French and German four days a week; but Len did say something about helping me just now even before we knew that Dad was going off like this, and I said I'd be jolly glad if she would, in French, anyhow. If all three of them do it, I expect I'll be able to manage *something* by the end of the hols; and you're bound to pick it up when you have people talking nothing *but* French or German all round you for a whole day at a time. Only—what about the things we have in the house in Croydon?"

"That's all right. It's only rented and your father intends giving it up as from Christmas. Once you folk all get back to school, Dr. Jack and I will take a hurried trip to England—he has to go, in any case—and clear the house. We'll warehouse the furniture and things like that and you people must make out lists of what you want us to bring to the Platz."

"Oh! Well, it all sounds miraculous! Shall I go and tell the rest now?"

Joey nodded. "Trot, by all means! Oh, and don't forget to send Roger to me first!" Joey had to shriek the last words after her, for she had shot off to the boathouse where the

Maynards and her brothers were enjoying themselves, practising diving off the Tub. Jack Maynard had given permission for them to row about in her so long as they kept to the upper end of the lake where the water was comparatively shallow at the Buchau side. The whole lot could swim more or less and so long as they kept away from the landing-stage at Seespitz, they could come to no harm through the ferry, as it went from Buchau to Seespitz in a wide sweep towards the other shore.

Ruey had to toss off her terry bathrobe and swim out to the Tub to deliver her message to Roger. She arrived just as her brother left the Tub in a beautiful swallow dive, so she had to wait until he came to the surface, despite the eager looks the triplets were directing at her. The three younger boys made no fuss about things. Roger and Roddy were to continue at St. Paul's, so termtime, at any rate, would make no changes for Stephen and Charles. So far as the home business was concerned, Roddy was a young man who usually lived a day at a time and never worried about what was coming next. Roger and Ruey, however, were different and both were old enough to know that the casual way in which their father had tried to deal with them was unlikely to work as he expected.

When her brother came up and had finished blowing, Ruey, who had clambered into the Tub, gave him a yell. "Hi, Roger! Mrs. Maynard wants to speak to you at once. Better scram! She's waiting in the garden."

Roger waved an arm above his head to show that he understood, turned over and made for the Buchau landing with a powerful crawl which got him there in short order. He clambered out on to the shore-road, incidentally startling a couple of elderly ladies who had been so busy chatting that they never noticed him in the water, and when six foot or so of young man suddenly heaved itself out of the water and crossed the road a few yards in front of them, clad only in the exiguous swimming trunks the boys all wore, they shrieked with dismay and alarm. Roger took no notice. He swung open the gate of Die Blumen and stalked across the narrow front lawn and round the chalet to the back garden where he found Joey, as he had expected, stretched out in the standing-hammock, busy with the mail which had just arrived. She glanced up and grinned at the lanky object who dropped down at her feet, grabbing the big towel she had laid beside her in readiness for when she should join the family.

"Hi! That's *my* towel!" she said mildly.

"Mine's in the boathouse. I'll go and ask Anna for another when you're ready. Ruey said you wanted to see me pronto."

"Quite right; I do. What a Red Indian you look, Roger!"

"Hair and all!" he said grinning as he passed a hand over his head where the dark red hair was already drying in the hot sun.

"Even to an honourable scar to tell of mighty battles nobly waged!" she capped him, returning grin for grin. "However, a truce to such nonsense! I sent for you to tell you what is to be your near future."

"I can guess—to a great extent. Dad's not going to worry his head about his offspring. No fear! He's going to do whatever you and Doc suggest." He turned round to peer at her. "That's right, isn't it?"

Somewhat taken aback, Joey nodded. "That's it. Your dad and my husband have gone off to Innsbruck to sign papers and things so that everything is done legally. We are to be your guardians until he returns from this latest journey——"

"If he ever *does* return!" Roger interjected.

Joey stared at him, open-mouthed. "What are you getting at?"

"Hasn't he told you—or the Doctor? Do you mean to tell me he's never even breathed a word? Oh, well! I guess he'd be likely to keep quiet about it. But I do know this much, and I'm passing it on. He's all set to go up in the first space rocket or space-ship or whatever they do use, that's manned by humans and has a definite port of call, so to speak. I know he's heard from one of his pals that a certain country has designs that way and he means to be one of the first space travellers, so he's off to bag a seat by hook or by crook!"

"*What?* But he couldn't be so mad! No one could at this date!" Joey cried.

"Couldn't he just! If you ask me, he's always been a bit touched on the subject of space travel. He once told me he was convinced there was life on Mars—and he meant human sort of life. I think that since Mother died, it's grown on him. I fancy she sort of tried to keep him in bounds. I knew what he was after all right, but I rather hoped he wouldn't be able to tackle it until the two kids had left school, anyway. It's bad luck that it's come so soon—if it really *has* come. I just wouldn't know about that."

"But—does he realise that he may never come back? That even if it's possible to get the thing into space it may not be possible—most likely won't be—to bring it back into the earth's atmosphere again? Besides, anyhow, no one's going to have a go at Mars for a first effort. It'll be the moon and even if they get there, how do they imagine they're going to live outside whatever they go up in? Good Heavens! No *sane* being would think of risking all that *now* when so little is known of—of all that—that—well—*district!* Practically everything is guesswork, so far. Hang it all, Roger, he's not living in a science fiction novel!" she wound up with energy. "He must be completely mad!"

"If you ask me, that's precisely what he is, on that point!" Roger retorted.

The bitterness that gave edge to his young voice changed the current of Joey's thoughts. She leaned forward to give the boy a friendly thump on the back. "Buck up, Roger! After all, *we've* come along in the nick of time! At least it means that all the worry about Ruey and Roddy is taken off your shoulders. That belongs to Jack and me in the future. As for your dad, if he really is touched on the subject, we can only be sorry for him, the poor creature! Though, mind you, I don't for a moment imagine that any such flight is at all possible yet—nor for years to come. It'll probably resolve itself into various experiments and tests. In the meantime, for your comfort, you three are well guarded. A sum of money is to be left in our hands to apply to your education and training when you three are ready for that last. Your finances are all quite sound and there's plenty for university or whatever training you want for all three of you. For instance," in an effort to divert his thoughts, "what are your ideas about *your* future?"

"Oh, I'm going in for civil engineering. I want my B.Sc. first, and then practical work and other diplomas."

"Oh, well, that should be easy enough to arrange. You bag Jack for a natter about universities. Has your dad put you down for anywhere? Not? Then Jack will see to it. Any idea what Roddy wants?"

"Not an earthly! He's just a kid, anyhow. Plenty of time for him."

"He's thirteen—or as near as makes no matter. Time he was considering it. You have to lay your plans so far ahead these days. Steve, for instance, means to be an engineer and young Mike—you'll meet him later on—is for the Navy. Chas hasn't said anything yet, but I've an idea he knows exactly what he wants."

"He's a rum kid, ain't he?" Roger was glad to turn away from his own problems. "Such a silent little chap, but when he speaks, it's generally pretty well to the point." He suddenly turned to face his hostess. "Thanks a lot, Mrs. Maynard, for being so jolly decent about it all.

And I'm thankful Ruey has someone like you to keep an eye on her. She—well, I could look out for Rod, if it came to that, but a girl wants a woman to see to her.”

“I agree. You know, Roger, you mustn't feel too badly about your dad.” Joey spoke with great care, but she hadn't liked the bitterness with which he had spoken just now. “The fact of the matter is, he's one of the men Kipling had in mind when he wrote ‘He travels the fastest who travels alone’.”

“But he did marry and they did have us. We're really his responsibility—only he's shifting us quite calmly. Looking back, I can see now that he's done that at pretty well every turn.”

“Ye—es. That's in character, too. But it isn't going to improve matters if you get up against him. I imagine he can't help himself—any more than I can help bargaining in when I see help is needed. I'm still known as the champion butter-in of the family.”

Roger's lips relaxed. “In that case, I'd say Dad was the champion butter-out!” He was silent again for a minute or two. Then he asked abruptly, “What about cash, you said—will there be plenty?”

“That's all right, too. The income from certain securities comes to us to settle all your expenses. There is also a largish cheque for present incidental expenses—clothes for next term—pocket-money—all that sort of thing. We'll go into it nearer the beginning of term. Meanwhile your father is leaving us on Friday. Be decent to him, all three of you. Don't part in bitterness, or it may taint the rest of your lives if anything *should* happen—which, quite frankly, I don't expect. I'm positive that not one country on earth is ready yet for actual space travel.”

“What makes you so sure?” he asked.

“Oh, I picked up a book lying around in the study and cast an eye over it. If the man who wrote it is right, space-travel isn't likely to come for the next quarter-of-a-century, if then. There are an appalling number of difficulties to overcome, quite apart from finding some material for the ship itself that will stand up to the terrific heats and so on. What I think is that your father may bury himself in some out-of-the-way place and forget about everything but his special yen. Try to get some sort of address out of him, Roger. The doctor hasn't done it so far. The best either he or I could get was that he would let us know when he knew more himself. That may mean anything or nothing. Try, at least, to get the name of the country.”

“I'll do my best. Don't know if I'll get anything very definite, though. Dad's being very cagey about the whole business. Can't we get something from the passports place if he goes off regardless? They'd know wouldn't they?”

“They might not. Richardson isn't such an uncommon name as all that.”

“No; that's true enough. On the other hand,” a quick grin lit up Roger's face, “I'll bet you any money there aren't many George Theophilus Archibald Baynard Richardsons in the world!”

“*What?* Is that his name?” Joey gasped. She eyed Roger with suspicion. “This isn't an outside in leg-pulls, is it?”

He shook his head. “It's true enough. Pa was named for his father, both grandfathers and his mother's maiden name. She was Ruhannah Baynard. That's where Ruey gets her weird name from.” He got to his feet, stretching widely. “Well, I think I'll get back to the others. Thanks a lot for everything, Mrs. Maynard. Aren't you coming along for a swim presently?”

Joey glanced at her watch. “Not till this afternoon. Geoff and Phil will want their dinner around midday and it's eleven now. Oh, I know Anna and the Coadjutor can cope, but I like to see to it myself if I'm around.”

“Well, come for a quick one—you’ve the best part of an hour and if the sun goes on hotting up as he’s doing now, no one will want to swim this afternoon. Oh, *come* on!”

Joey laughed and gave in. “You tootle along and tell them I’m coming. I’ll dash up and change.” She crammed everything into the big raffia basket at her side, and fled, leaving him to quit the garden, plunge in with a long, running dive and carry the news that the mistress of the house was coming.

“She’s not on the road yet,” Margot said, shading her eyes to look.

“She’s just coming out of the gate,” Con cried. “Oh, look! She’s swimming it!”

“What? Here—out of the way! She mustn’t risk swimming all that distance!” Roger plunged at the oars, but the triplets stopped him.

“Mamma’s a fish when it comes to water!” Con exclaimed. “She can beat even Mary-Lou Trelawney and she’s been school swimming champion for years!”

“Mother really is terrific,” Margot added. “There she goes!” As Joey, who had walked to the little boat-landing raised her arms over her head and dived in. “Now then, Roger Richardson! Just look at her arms, going like pistons! Can she swim, or can she?”

“Gosh!” Roddy, sprawling in the bottom of the boat, looked at the long arms going, as Margot had said, like pistons. Mrs. Maynard seemed to cut through the water like a torpedo. She reached them quickly, even as they began to cheer, and instantly challenged all who liked to a race.

“We’ll take the boat further out,” she said as she trod water, “and race back to the boathouse from her. Tumble in, you folk! Steve and Chas, I’m afraid you’ll have to stand down from this. Roddy, too, I think. None of you are safe over the distance and we *don’t* want to have to give a display of life-saving instead of a perfectly good race. I’ll take on Roger and Ruey—not too tired, are you, Ruey?—and the triplets if they like the idea.”

“I should just about think we do!” Margot cried, as Roger helped her mother to scramble into the boat—the last to do it—and Len and Con, who were at the oars, dipped them in and rowed further out into the middle of the lake.

“This O.K.?” Len asked presently. “If we go much further, we’ll be in the current and that’ll rather mess up the race, won’t it?”

“Quite correct! This will do nicely. Now listen, all of you. I’m sending you off at intervals of three seconds each. That’ll give Ruey and Con, for instance, a chance to beat the rest of us. I’ll come last, seeing I’ve probably had more practice than any of you lately. As soon as I’ve dived, Roddy, you take the oars and row more or less alongside the course—a straight line—or as straight as we can manage—from here to the boathouse. Then if anyone has to fall out, you’ll be on the spot. Steve, you take the other oars and Chas can cox for you. Now do you three quite understand?”

They said that they did, so she let it go and lined up the others, with Ruey at one end of the line and herself last.

“Time us, Roddy!” she commanded. “Three seconds between each. When I’ve gone, you row steadily towards the boathouse. Don’t try to beat us. The whole idea is that you should be ready to pick up the pieces if necessary. All set? Right! Off you go, Ruey!”

Ruey entered the water with a terrific splash. In fact, her dive came perilously near being a “flopper.” She came up, gasping, but steadied gamely into her stroke and forged ahead as hard she could. Con, the poorest of the triplets followed her. Then came Len and then Margot who could swim when she chose.

“Roger!” Joey called, with an eye on the four heads bobbing about in the water. “Don’t forget, boys, the moment I go, you pick up your oars. Oh, and don’t try to lay any of us out. Keep over a little.”

Roger dived, straight as an arrow and startled his own sister by coming up nearly alongside her. Ruey was game, but she was not fast, and he had swum a considerable way under water. Joey accomplished a beautiful swallow dive surfacing just behind Ruey, to whom she called as she settled into her stroke. “Wait for the boat if you’re tired, Ruey! It’ll be up in a second!”

Ruey scorned to do that, but seeing that she had no faintest chance to beat even Con who was swimming her hardest and keeping ahead of both Len and Margot at the moment she eased off and paddled comfortably along the course.

Roger might be no boatman, but he was a fine swimmer and Joey found she had all her work cut out to beat him after the start she had given him. They had gone two-thirds of the way along the course before she overhauled first Margot, who was tiring, and then Roger. Len, hearing her sister’s yell of dismay, put all she knew into her swimming and shot past Con, who was still going valiantly. The three boys in the boat were shrieking wildly, and Ruey who was now hanging on to the side and letting them pull her, joined her yells with theirs. In short, a magnificent noise was made by all four and Charles was so excited, that he threw his lines aside to stand up and dance with the natural result that he went headfirst into the lake. Not that it mattered. All the Maynards could swim from Len down to the twins, Felix and Felicity. He came up gasping and puffing and scrambled over the bows of the boat to pick up his rudder-lines and change course, while Ruey, taking advantage of the momentary halting of the boat, clambered over the stern and landed with a resounding flop on her brother’s feet.

Joey shot past Con and set to work to overhaul her firstborn. But Roger had kept a last shot in his locker and just as she and Len were almost shoulder to shoulder, he went past the pair of them, going like a thunderbolt, as Con said later. Len was nearly finished by this time, but Joey was still going within herself and she did her best to beat the long fellow. In the end, neither won, for both grabbed at the boathouse at the same moment and Len, who had made a final effort, was only two seconds behind them.

Joey hauled herself out of the water to drop down on the grassy shore under some bushes and wipe the water out of her eyes with the back of her hand. Roger followed and sprawled at full length. Len scrambled out and dropped down beside them, flinging her arms wide. The next moment, she sat up with an exclamation and sucked at the back of her hand.

“There’s something sharp here. Gosh! I did give my hand a knock! I’m cut, whatever it is.” And she turned to rummage with her free hand.

She produced from among the bushes a small black tin box which she held out to the other two just as Con arrived to join them. Roger stared at it. Then he snatched it from her with an exclamation.

“Great jumping Jehoshaphat! What’s *that* doing here? It’s Dad’s—he thinks a lot of it. Keeps it locked up in his safe mostly. What’s it doing *here*?”

“I should think only he could answer that,” Joey said reasonably. “Suck your hand, Len. When we get back to the house, I’ll dab you with iodine. What is it Roger?”

“Not an earthly. I only know Dad regards it as more precious than diamonds.” He turned it over and pointed. “There’s his initials—look! G.T.A.B.R.”

There they indeed were, painted in tiny lettering in red enamel.

She took the box from Roger and examined it. There seemed to be no means of opening it, for it was soldered all along the lid and the box.

“We’d better take this up to the house and I’ll put it in our safe,” she said at last. “I’ll take it now, and Len, you come with me and get that cut seen to. Lock up the boathouse before you come, will you, Roger? Well, this is a mystery, beyond a doubt! However, I expect your father can explain when he comes.” Then she jumped up, caught Len and took her racing along the path to the house. But when Jack Maynard came back from Innsbruck with all the legal papers duly signed, sealed and witnessed, he came alone. In reply to her frantic questioning, he could only say that the professor had said he had to meet a friend and would be at the station for the last train to catch the mountain railway. He had never turned up and Jack, deciding that he must have come up on an earlier train, had left it at that.

Joey held her tongue after that, but though she and Jack sat up till midnight, the professor never turned up. Nor did he arrive next day, and she would have been afraid of what might have happened, but all three of the Richardsons assured her that it was quite normal for him to go off like that.

“He’ll write as soon as he thinks of it,” Roger said. “Meanwhile, what about the box?”

Jack looked at him. “That,” he said firmly, “is going into the nearest safe-deposit until we can hand it over to himself. We’ll all go down to Innsbruck tomorrow and take it there and then show you three R’s the city. And that will be that.”

And it was so. But though they waited, no word came from Professor Richardson neither that week nor the next nor the next. Joey was looking forward to the return of the younger members of her family in the near future and Ruey was beginning to talk both French and German with a little fluency and even Roger and Roddy had picked up a certain amount. School was not far over the horizon. But the professor seemed to have vanished as though on that day when he and Jack had gone to Innsbruck, he had already taken off into space.

Chapter XII

AT THE CHALET IN THE PASS

“Mamma! Mam—ma—a!” Margot’s clear voice rang through the house and Joey came abruptly from the nursery where she had been busy with her babies, to hush her shrieks.

“Margot Maynard! *Will* you be quiet? You know quite well that this is nap time for the twins and yet you come howling about like a hysterical banshee! What do you *mean* by it?”

Margot came running upstairs from the hall, looking thoroughly conscience-stricken. “Oh, I quite forgot! I’m frightfully sorry! I haven’t roused them, have I? But I haven’t, or they’d be on the howl.”

“The less *you* say about being on the howl, the better!” Joey retorted wrathfully. “No; they’re still asleep, thank goodness. Now what do you want?”

“Well, Roger has just remembered that his dad told him that they would have to clear out the chalet—their own belongings, that is—because he only rented it up to the end of August and that comes next week. So Roger said what about us crowd hopping over for the day today as we haven’t got any special expedition fixed up, and getting a start made? And he doesn’t know what to do about the furniture. Len said you or Papa could tell him. Can we—may we, I mean?” Margot caught herself up quickly.

Joey looked at her severely. “Your English is simply ghastly! ‘Us crowd,’ indeed! Now don’t begin again!” She held up her hand as Margot opened eager lips. “Just wait here a moment. I’m coming.”

She turned back into the nursery, but her new twins were learning the lesson that all the Maynard babies learned early in life—to sleep through most noises. They were slumbering sweetly, though, as she remarked to Rösli who was sitting by the window with her knitting, she and they had had a bad night of it.

“Teeth, I’m afraid,” she added, as she gave the babies a last look. “They’re both dribbling. I foresee a hectic time before us for the next few months if last night is anything to go by.”

She left the room on that and rejoined Margot who was still waiting for her in the corridor outside with what patience she could muster. Joey tucked an arm through hers and marched her off downstairs.

“From now on, you people *must* moderate your squalls,” she said as they went. “Those two are starting to teeth. We had a bad night of it and they’re worn out, poor pets! Don’t any of you dare wake them up with your noise!”

“Isn’t it awfully *soon*?” Margot asked.

“Cecil began at about the same age. Babies are forward young things, these days. You three were all of six months before you began. Now, where are the others?”

“In the salon, waiting to hear what you say.”

“Right! You run along and tell them I’m coming. I want to have a word with Anna first. I’ll be along in a minute or two.” Joey freed her arm and turned off to the kitchen while Margot headed for the salon where she found the rest waiting to hear the result of her errand.

“She’s coming in a sec,” she announced. “She’s just gone to speak to Anna—and I can guess why. It’ll be O.K. Oh, and she thinks the twins are starting with their teeth, so we’re not to make a noise when they’re asleep.”

“Did she have a bad night with them?” Len asked quickly.

Margot nodded. "Wouldn't you know that they'd do that sort of thing the one night Rösli was away? Mother says they're worn out. We'll have to remember."

"But *we* didn't hear them howling," Ruey said. "At least, *I* didn't."

"We're in the other corridor. We probably wouldn't," Len explained. She looked at her sisters. "I wonder if one of us ought to stay to help out in case she needs us?"

"She won't—not now Rösli's come back," Margot said airily.

Con faced on her elder sister with a peculiar look that Len evidently understood, for she went slowly deep pink, much to the amazement of Ruey and her brothers.

"Len, don't forget what Mamma said last term about leaving other folk to stand on their own feet and looking out for yourself," she said impressively.

Before anyone could say anything else, the door opened again and Joey arrived to inform them that Anna was packing baskets with meat, rolls, butter and fruit and they might go to the lonely chalet in the Pass for the day, but must be back home by eighteen hours unless she and Jack came over before then which they might do, as something must be arranged about such furniture as the Richardsons had brought with them from England.

"I'm afraid I never gave it another thought after your father told me he was giving up the chalet at the end of the month," she said.

"What shall we do about it?" Roger asked. "There's quite a fairish lot—all Dad's room, for instance. And things in all the others."

"I'll have to talk it over with Jack. Probably the best thing will be to bring it to the Görnetz Platz and store it at Freudesheim. Goodness knows we've any amount of room. There are at least three bedrooms entirely emptied, to say nothing of some of the attic cubicles. I don't see much point in sending it to Croydon when your father has given up that house, too—or is going to."

"Thanks a lot. That strikes me as a jolly decent scheme. Then we'd better all get off and see to the clearing-up at the chalet."

"The sooner the better, from my point of view. I want this house kept quiet to give Geoff and Phil a chance to recover from their very bad night. And I shan't be sorry for a chance of a snooze myself. *No, Len!*" as that young lady opened her lips. "Both Rösli and Anna will be here and I don't need help from anyone else. Papa has gone off with that doctor who is staying at the Seehof and will have lunch there with him, though he said he'd be back for Kaffee und Kuchen at sixteen hours. That'll give me a chance to rest, if the babies are all right, and also to discuss your furniture's future, you three, when we meet over the coffee-cups."

"Then we'd better ooze off," Roger rejoined, standing up and stretching.

Joey looked at them all thoughtfully. "Packing is a messy job as I know all too well. Best go and change into clothes that don't matter. Oh, and you'll need lots of paper for the crockery and other bits and pieces. Steve, you and Chas cut along to the kitchen and ask Anna to give you a few bundles of newspapers from her cupboard. By the way, what are you packing the things into?"

"The cases they came in, I suppose," Ruey said. "We've smashed some of them up but a good many are still all right. But if everything is going to your house, couldn't we just tie up the books in bundles and let them go loose?"

"Not your father's books," Joey said with decision. "A good many of them are pretty valuable from what I've seen of them. We have plenty of cases here, though. We'll see about them tomorrow or next day. I think you'd better tie up the books—you'll find some balls of string in that cupboard in the study, Len—and leave them piled by the wall. Keep the

Professor's separate from the rest. Then pack all the linen and curtains and so on in what cases you have, and also the crocks and kettles and pans. Leave those to the last, by the way. You'll need them for your meals today. I suppose the electricity is still turned on, Roger?"

"Sure it is. *We* never turned it off, and I'll swear *Dad* wouldn't give a thought to it."

"Besides it was on that day Jack and I went to see your father to make arrangements for you three. I know, because we had a cup of coffee halfway through the proceedings. And I'm positive he meant to be back that night. It's awfully odd, Roger! Your father just went off regardless and he's never written to anyone, so far as we know."

"Oh, that's Dad!" Ruey said quickly. "He always does things like that. Don't worry, Mrs. Maynard. Honestly, it's exactly the sort of thing he does do."

"Well, it certainly seems the thing he's done this time," Joey agreed. "I can't say I like it, but after all, he could look after himself and if there'd been an accident, we should have heard about it long before this. All right, we'll let it go. Now you lot go and change. You can't mess about packing things and clearing up looking all spick and span as you do at the moment. No point in getting decent clothes messed up! Oh, and by the way, as Jack and I are your guardians, you three, I think you'll have to stop calling us Dr. and Mrs. Maynard. What about Uncle and Aunt? We've several adopted nieces and nephews and always room for a few more. What about it?"

"Oh, may we?" Ruey cried. "I'd love to, only I didn't like to ask."

"Then you're a triple goop!" the lady retorted smartly. "All right. That's another thing settled. Now you scram upstairs and change. I'll send Steve and Chas to do likewise when they arrive with those papers. Don't forget the string, Len."

"I won't—I'll get it now before I go up!" And Len sped off to the study to rummage in the big cupboard while Joey hurled a last order after the rest. "On tiptoes, please! Don't *dare* to wake my babies, any of you, or pity help you!"

They hurried over their changing. As the Maynards all knew and the Richardsons were to learn in due time, though Joey herself was easy-going enough, Anna could scold bitterly if they messed up or destroyed their clothes needlessly. They finally set off at eleven, looking as the mistress of the house did not fail to tell them, a regular set of ragamuffins, for they had unearthed their oldest and most disreputable garments. Both Len and Margot looked all legs in the last summer's cottons they had elected to wear, while Ruey's shorts, though clean, had been crumpled badly and looked as if she had slept in them.

They caught the lake steamer at the Buchau landing-stage, and presently were setting off across the rough, sweet turf of the Briesau peninsula, headed for the Pass. The boys carried bundles of newspapers and Roger also had the big basket of food. Stephen had a rucksack full of potatoes slung across his shoulders and Roddy had another filled with lettuces. The girls carried a basket of ripe apricots, the half-dozen balls of string Len had unearthed and a couple of empty baskets, for Ruey proposed to bring away all the stores at the chalet and present them to Anna.

"There are two shelves full of tinned things," she said, "and about four pounds of coffee, as well as half a sack of flour and things like that. Anna may as well have them. She can use them all right and we can't just chuck them out."

"I say! You did stock up!" Con said with a giggle.

"Well, we didn't want to have to be going to buy food perpetually and tins are the easiest when you're living right away from everyone like us," Ruey replied. "I should have thought

of it sooner. All we needed to have brought from your place was the bread and fruit and lettuces. However, it's too late now."

"Oh, well, tins always keep and they'll come in handy," Margot said cheerfully.

By this time, they had left Briesau and were climbing up the narrow path that led to the beginning of the Pass. The sun was shining with full force again but once they were in the Pass itself, they were well shielded from the worst of his rays. In fact, in parts, it was distinctly gloomy, even on this brilliant August day.

Con looked about her and shivered. "I don't think I'd like to live here at all. It's all very well just coming for the day, but it's the sort of place where you'd never be surprised to hear that murder had been committed!"

"You pipe down!" Len cried. Then she added: "All the same, it must get dark along here awfully early. I should loathe to live here in the winter!"

"It didn't worry us," Roger said with a grin. "We were out most of the time. Anyhow, we didn't have an awful lot of it. We met you folk and that was that."

"Someone might do a murder today, perhaps," Roddy suggested with another grin.

"Thanks, but I'd rather be excused," Len returned. "Anyhow, it wouldn't be likely to be any of us. There's too many of us."

"How true!" Roger chuckled. They they reached the curve in the path within which lay the little grass plot where the chalet stood. He produced the key and they all skipped up the steps and waited while he set down his burdens and unlocked the door.

"Phew! Isn't there a fug!" Ruey exclaimed, elevating her nose as she followed him in. "Well, our first job is to air the place."

They went round the rooms, flinging every casement to its widest. The door was left open and when that was done they looked round.

"What shall we begin with?" Con asked.

"Curtains and linen, I should think," Ruey replied. She crossed over to the big chest and threw back the lid. "There are some blankets here and some pillow-cases; a couple of table-cloths and some more things like that. Let's have them out and scrouge them up a bit to make room for the rest—what are you doing Len?" as that young woman walked to the door with the big kettle in her hand.

"I'm going to the spring for water," Len explained. "We'll start work presently, but how about a cup of coffee first?"

"Hi! You can't shove *that* into the spring like a bucket!" Roger shouted, leaping to take it from her. "Think of the element, woman! You go back and fish for cups and things, and I'll take the bucket. But for heavens' sake never shove a thing with an electric element into water! You'll finish it!"

Len flushed. Then her eyes gleamed wickedly. "I see you know something about electricity," she said patronisingly before she ducked—only just in time. He had snatched up a cushion from a chair and flung it at her. So their day got off to a good start. By the time Len and Roger had settled their difference, everyone was hard at it and they were all chattering together at once.

Roger finally went off to the spring with the bucket and Len, having tidied her ponytail, set to work to bring cups and saucers from the cupboard while Ruey "rootled" among her stores and finally produced a big tin of mixed biscuits. There was plenty of evaporated milk among the stores and a box of the flat oblongs of sugar Joey Maynard had once declared always meant Tirol to her. By the time Roger had come back with his bucket, they were ready.

The foresighted Stephen had switched on the hot plate so that it was glowing redly and Con had found the percolator and filled the cup with coffee.

In less than a quarter of an hour, they were seated about the room with cups of coffee and the best mixed biscuits and enjoying themselves. The place was dusty but no one minded that.

"How are we arranging things?" Ruey asked, as she took her sixth biscuit. "Have another, Chas? We may as well finish this lot today and that'll be *one* less thing to worry about. Steve—Con—Margot—Len? Come on Roddy. You've *only* had five up to date."

"Anything to oblige!" Roddy grabbed a handful and retired into a corner, regardless of the reproaches his sister hurled at his bad manners and greed.

"Pipe down, you two!" Roger said, helping himself to his eighth effort. "How are we arranging things, Rue? What d'ye mean?"

"Well, we can't *all* go for the same thing. There's too many of us," she pointed out. "Suppose Len and I strip the beds first and get the sheets and things folded ready for packing. Then you and Steve could roll the mattresses and tie them up."

"Did you bring your own mattresses?" Con asked. "Whatever for?"

"Dad said something about sleeping on feathers and I wasn't doing that for anyone, not at this time of year. So we brought our own spring mattresses and they'll have to come back with us."

"*Can* you roll them if they're springs?" Margot wanted to know.

"Of course you can't," Roger said.

"Well, we always rolled the mattresses when we camped out that time in Scotland," Ruey said.

"Those, my good kid, were the old hair mattresses that old Wothers turned out when she made Dad buy the springs because they were healthier or something. These 'ull have to be laid flat. I should think you'd smash the springs if you tried to roll them. We can pile 'em on top of each other, though. The bedsteads belong to the chalet, so they'll remain. Look here! I vote we bring everything that's ours in here and when the men come to shift 'em, they won't have to go hunting through all the rooms. How about it?"

"Good idea," Len said. "Only don't forget to leave a space round the cooker and another round the sink. Remember, we have to pack the crocks when we've done with them and that means washing them first. I *wonder*! Wouldn't it be better to shove everything into your father's room where they'll be out of the way?"

"Then you'll have to clear that first," Con said thoughtfully. "Look here! Suppose Margot and I go and tie up the books in there and get the shelves cleared. We could carry those in here all right and when Len and Ruey have packed the chest, we might pile the books on top. It *is* your chest, isn't it?"

"Well, it must be," Charles put in. "Aren't you putting the sheets and things into it? Well then!" He added. "What about Roddy an' me? What do we do?"

"Clear the store cupboard," Ruey said swiftly. "Pack all the tins into those empty baskets we brought—or as much as you can. The rest can go into the other baskets later on. They'll be empty all right when we've finished!"

Everyone being duly provided with a job, Len emptied what was left of the coffee into Roddy's ever-ready cup and proceed to wash up first, after which they parted company to attend to their chores, only Roddy and Charles remaining in the living-room where they set to work to clear the shelves of all the stores Ruey had stocked up when they first came out.

Roger and Stephen had started proceedings by going out to the shed behind the chalet in search of the cases for the china and other small things and also a hank of cord which Roger said was hanging up there and might be useful. By the time they had done this, Len and Ruey had stripped the beds and were carrying the bedclothes out and hanging them over the railing of the verandah to air before they were folded and packed into the chest. Len regarded them thoughtfully. Then she went in, picked up the bucket which was still three parts full of water and staggered across the room to the cooker with it.

“What are you going to do?” Ruey demanded.

“Wash that lot out,” Len said briefly. “You can’t pack half-used things like that, Ruey. By the time they’re *unpacked*, they’ll be horrible. They’re not really dirty—only crumpled—except Roddy’s,” she added with a glance at the said sheets. “They’ll dry in half no time in this heat and we needn’t bother about ironing them.”

“We couldn’t, in any case. No iron,” Ruey returned as briefly.

“How did you manage, then?”

“Oh, a Frau Pfeiffau did that for us. I fixed it up when we came. But we can’t lift that great bucket by ourselves, Len. It’s much too heavy. I’ll get Roger!” And she hung over the rail and yelled, “Ro—ger!”

“Coming!” Roger followed his call promptly. “What d’ye want?”

“Len says we ought to wash the sheets and things before we pack. They’ll dry quickly and there’s plenty of washing stuff in the store cupboard. Come and lift the bucket on to the hot-plate for us, will you?”

“O.K.—though I think it’s a lot of fuss,” the ignorant male replied. He lifted the bucket and then caught up the other. “I’ll fill this as well and you can hot the two. That’ll give you all the hot water you want.”

He was gone quite a short time, during which, Stephen was busy lugging the big wooden cases out on to the grass and Ruey and Len, having disposed of the bedrooms were clearing the great chest of its contents before rolling them tightly and packing them in as closely as possible. They heard him before they saw him. In fact, they heard not only him, but at least half-a-dozen other male voices and Ruey had the curiosity to run out and look over the verandah. She came back looking horrified.

“What’s going to happen *now*? Roger’s bringing a horde of other boys along with him.”

“Hikers!” said Len swiftly. “I expect they want drinks and he’s offered them coffee. Oh, bother him! Now we’ll have to stop and make it! Aren’t boys maddening the way they do things like that? Mercifully, the water in this is nearly boiling, so it won’t take long to make the coffee. How many are there, Rue?”

“Dozens!”

“*What*?” Len was beside her and counting as well as she could. She heaved a sigh of relief. “Gosh! How you exaggerate! There’s only seven besides Roger.”

“What *are* you two nattering about?” Margot appeared in the doorway of the Professor’s room.

“Roger’s bringing a band of hikers for drinks,” Len said. “At least, I suppose he is.”

“What on earth for? They’ve only a half mile or so to go before they get to Briesau and the hotels. Oh, well! I’ll get out the cups, shall I? Hi, Con, come and help cope, will you? Roger’s bringing some hikers for coffee!”

By this time, the hikers had reached the grass patch where they proceeded to heave off their rucksacks, throw down their sturdy alpenstocks, and sprawl comfortably while Roger

himself, carrying his bucket carefully, mounted the steps.

“Well!” said his sister severely. “What’s all this in aid of?”

“Oh, those chaps—they’ve been doing a hike through the Schwarzwald, they said—are perishing for something to drink. I guessed your water would be hot so I said we’d give ’em coffee. They started off at the crack of dawn, so I should think they might be glad of a drink.”

“And us in the middle of all *this*!” Ruey waved her hand round the room.

“They don’t want to come into the place, you mutt! All they want is a drink. That won’t take you five minutes to see to.”

“You stop talking and put that other bucket up,” Len said.

He did so and then came closer to the pair—Con and Margot had found a big tray and were busily arranging cups and saucers, a jug of evaporated milk and a bowlful of sugar on it—and said in an undertone. “I say, we might be in for a bit of excitement, from what they say.”

“How’s that?” Len asked, watching her percolator carefully.

“It seems there’s been a big bank robbery. Three masked men broke in—at least they walked into one of the banks in some place in Germany—about six hours away, one of ’em said. They shot up the manager and the clerks and got away with lord knows how much swag. The police are out after ’em and they got one. The rumour is that the other two *may*—but it’s only ‘may’, of course—be making for the Pass here to try to get away into the something-or-other Thal and get clear that way.”

Ruey looked at him with horror. “You don’t mean they’re coming this way?”

“Oh, it’s only a rumour. But it might be quite likely when you think of it. ’Tisn’t as if a lot of people used the Pass—not these days. Those chaps say they wouldn’t be surprised if it wasn’t closed shortly. There’ve been some pretty bad landslides further along. They had their work cut out to get through in one or two places where practically the whole road is carried away.”

“Well,” said Len tartly with an eye for Ruey’s face, “let’s hope there’s another landslide or two before those brutes get here and the *whole* of the road goes. Here! Your coffee’s done. Take it down to those pals of yours and stop hindering us. How did you manage to talk to them, by the way?”

“Not German, you may be very sure,” he grinned. “They come from a place they called Veen——”

“Vienna to you, my lad. The Austrians call it Wien.”

“Oh? Well, I didn’t know. Anyhow, all of them speak English—of a sort.”

“Oh, I see. It doesn’t really matter. You take that tray and give them their drinks. We’ll discuss this when they’ve gone.”

“Discuss what?” Con asked at this point.

“Just some wild yarn Roger’s got from those lads outside. Is the tray ready? You’d better take it, Roger, and I’ll bring the coffee. It won’t go on the tray.”

Roger meekly picked up the tray and departed with it, Len following him with the percolator. The young fellows jumped to their feet and saluted her as she appeared. More than one of them gave her admiring glances. Even in her shabby and outgrown cotton frock, Len Maynard could never look anything but pretty and her indignation with Roger had deepened the pink in her cheeks and given her eyes an additional sparkle.

She said, “Gruss Gott!” in her pretty German as she acknowledged their salutes but she made no attempt to stay with them. Ruey had been scared by Roger’s report and she was

anxious to get back and calm the girl down if she could. She set the percolator on the grass with a nod and a smile, and went back to find that Ruey had already repeated her brother's tale to Con and Margot and all three were hard at it discussing it.

"We can't do anything about it until those boys have gone and Roger comes back," she said. "Don't let's waste time. And Ruey, I don't believe a word of it. Much more likely the bank robbers have doubled back on their tracks. The police at Innsbruck and all round will have been alerted and they'd know they'd be on the look-out for them. Ruey, we can't do any washing until the place is clear again. I vote we go round the bedrooms and get your belongings together in your father's room. Then we can see what we ought to pack today. Where are Chas and Roddy?"

"In the shed, bringing out the cases," Con said. "Shall I call them in?"

"Yes; we'll need all hands on deck to get these rooms cleared and the cases can wait."

Chapter XIII

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS

The Viennese hikers finished their coffee and set off again after a vociferous chorus of thanks. Then, and then only, did the party from Die Blumen gather together to discuss the news the visitors had given Roger.

“I think we ought to lock up at once and go home,” Ruey said.

Len, who had been thinking hard, gave her pause. “Yes; and what are we going to tell Mother when she wants to know why we’ve chucked the job so soon? *I’m* not going to be the one to set her off worrying, so I can tell you! And incidentally, what’s to become of the things here? If those creatures came along and broke in, they could do it all right. That lock’s about as much use as a sick headache with men like that.”

“Oh, what does it *matter*?” Ruey cried wildly. “*Let* them burgle the lot if they want to! But don’t let’s risk being shot or anything!”

Roger, like Len, had also been thinking. “I quite agree that we can’t stay here after dark. But then we shouldn’t in any case. And it’s all very well for you to talk like that, Ruey, but we—or I, at any rate—are responsible for Dad’s belongings. There are all the papers in the safe, for one thing. Some of them are jolly important, too. They deal with his own special job and not *all* of them would be in that box affair we found the other day.”

“Well, open the safe and collect them and we can take them back with us.”

“O.K. And perhaps you’ll tell me how I’m to *open* the safe, seeing Dad hasn’t left his keys anywhere, so far as I know. The idea was that the whole thing was to be taken out as it is until we hear from him what he wants done with the thing.”

“Well, if you can’t, they ought to be all right, for then no one can.”

“Talk sense! Professionals have their own ways of dealing with safes. Not, mind you, that I really think they’re likely to come this way at all. If they’ve any sense, they must know that the police are hot on their tracks. Far more likely they’ll turn off to some big town or other where it’s a lot easier to lose yourself in the crowds than a place like this where strangers would be noticed on the spot—especially when you know that the cops have been alerted.”

Con, as usual, said exactly what came into her head. “But *would* it? Don’t forget this is a tourist centre. People hereabouts are accustomed to seeing strange faces every day of their lives—during the season, anyhow; and that’s now.”

“*Oh!*” thought Len, exasperatedly. “Why on earth can’t you learn to hold your tongue, Con?”

It was too late, however. The panicking Ruey had fastened on this at once.

“There you are, then! Oh, don’t let’s stay a moment longer! I want to go!”

No less a person than Roddy pulled her up. “O.K.!” he said scornfully. “*Go*, then! You funk! Just like a girl, though!”

Ruey stopped short. The contempt in his voice brought the hot colour surging to her face. It also roused the other three.

“How dare you?” Len exclaimed furiously. “We’re not funk! I vote we stay till the end of the afternoon, anyhow. We’ll get on with the packing as hard as we can and have Kaffee und Kuchen at sixteen hours. Then we’ll take everything of value that we possibly can. Now then, young Roderick!”

"Anyhow," Margot added, her blue eyes sparkling with anger, "if the cops are on to it, everyone around will have been alerted and they'll be on the look-out all right. And if Ruey is scared stiff, we three aren't! Anyhow, I believe Len's right and they've probably doubled on their tracks and are lying low somewhere near the place where they burgled."

"That'll be right!" Con added her quota. "But whatever happens, I do hope that *British* girls aren't funks!"

Before anyone could say anything more, the second bucket on the stove boiled over and Roger had to fly to the rescue. Ruey hurriedly switched off the heat and a grand mopping-up ensued. Charles, taking advantage of the fact that everyone else was too busy to notice, seized the chance to fulfil a long-felt want and grabbed the packet of detergent Ruey had set on the table and emptied it into the bucket, stirring it vigorously. By the time anyone had time to notice what he was doing, he had a huge pyramid of lather and was sopping wet into the bargain. The floor was splashed with blobs of foam in every direction and, as Ruey said, it looked as if they meant to set up a laundry!

"And he's like a drowned rat himself!" Len scolded. "*Now* what are we to do? There isn't a thing to fit him here. Oh, Chas, you really are the *edge*! Just look at the mess you've made! As if we hadn't enough to do without you going mad with soap powder!"

"Strip him and shut him into one of the rooms until his own things are dry," Roger advised. "He'll take no harm a day like this. It's hot enough to melt a brass monkey! Here! You come with me, young feller-me-lad and I'll attend to you myself. Rinse the soap out of his things, one of you girls, and hang 'em over the verandah rail. They'll be dry in half-an-hour!"

He set a large hand firmly on the scruff of the culprit's neck and punted him into Ruey's little bedroom. Charles grinned triumphantly at them as he went, perforce. "Anyhow, I've done it at last!" he informed them.

"I'll say you did!" his captor retorted. "In with you, you young pest!" And in Charles had to go. Roger returned two minutes later with the soapy shirt and shorts that were all he was wearing and tossed them across to Len to rinse and hang out to dry.

That, as Con said later when they were telling the elder Maynards the whole story, was the beginning of it all. They got Roger to cart the bucket of soapsuds outside and empty them into the zinc bath for them. The bed linen followed and the four girls squeezed and wrung, even Ruey forgetting her panic as they worked. It was a job to get the soap out, for Charles's effort had made it impossible to rinse the things clean and Roger had to go to the spring and fetch more water—which did not sweeten his temper in the least. They were done at last, by which time, Charles's garments were bone-dry, at least, even if they were well crumpled. He was summoned from the bedroom to get them as Len tossed them up to him from the steps while the other girls tipped up the bath and let the water run out over the grass. The suds, they had already poured into two big bowls, for Ruey had suggested that, seeing the awful mess the living-room was in, anyhow, it might be as well to scrub out the whole place except her father's room.

They had decided to picnic outside, and Stephen produced the next excitement by tripping up over a length of cord and falling from top to bottom of the steps with a fistful of knives and forks to which he clung valiantly, thereby, cutting his hand. It was only a skin cut, but it bled liberally until Ruey had unearthed her first-aid box and produced a bottle of styptic which checked it.

Then Margot, flying down the steps to rescue a wet pillowcase which had fallen down on the grass, contrived to catch her foot halfway down and accomplished the rest of her journey in a wild roll, accompanied by such ear-piercing shrieks, that everyone else dropped what they were doing and rushed to see what had happened. It wouldn't have mattered, but Ruey, who was washing-up, happened to have a saucepan in her hand at the time, and tossed it down on top of the cups with an abandon that reduced three of them to smithereens and sent a couple of saucers flying to add to the ruins. Margot proved to be more startled than hurt, but by the time they remembered the pillowcase and Con picked it up, it was streaked with green.

"We can't do anything about *that*," she said, eyeing it with distaste. "It'll have to go to the laundry when we get home."

Mishaps did not end there, either. During their meal, Roddy was moved to make a hideous face at Len who had just bitten a large mouthful out of her roll. She went off into a peal of laughter, choked on her roll and by the time she was better she was red and tearful and her ponytail had come down so that her hair was flying madly all round her. Even worse, she was very sore, for Roger, in an effort to be helpful, had thumped her hard on the back. Len had the very white skin that goes with red hair and she bruised easily. Ruey shrieked with horror when she saw the marks on her friend's back while they were undressing at bedtime.

But the climax was something that passed into the family annals. Joey and Jack laughed themselves nearly sick when they had recovered from the first shock and it was a long time before any of the crowd heard the last of it.

Thanks to all these minor excitements, they had all forgotten about the hikers and their surprising news; even Ruey. They spent the afternoon working hard and by sixteen hours, the books had all been tied into neat bundles and piled up on top of the great chest which was crammed to its limit with the household linen, pillows and cushions among which the china and silver from the Professor's room had been packed for safety. The store cupboard had been emptied and the baskets filled with its contents, while a couple of cardboard cartons had been called into service to take what was left over. The four boys had sorted out the furniture and stowed all that belonged to the Richardsons in the Professor's room, leaving only the chest which was too heavy for them to move so far, and a step-ladder. The long mop and scrubbing-brushes were theirs, too, but they had been left out for the final job.

"I think we've done jolly well," Len said complacently as she gazed round the denuded rooms. "Even the stupidest removal men couldn't possibly make a mistake as to what belonged to whom. And didn't you say you were going to label all the things to make absolutely *sure*, Roger?"

"Sure thing!" replied Roger, who was feeling his responsibilities heavily.

"Let's have Kaffee und Kuchen before we do another thing," Margot suggested.

"And then we can do the scrubbing," Ruey agreed. "The water can be heating while we're feeding."

"And while some of us are scrubbing, Roger and someone else can see to the labels and the rest can be clearing up the bits and pieces for the bonfire. Shove the perk on, Con. You're nearest. Ruey, you did leave out a tin of milk, didn't you? I don't like black coffee."

"Milk and a box of sugar and there's the fag-end of those tins of biscuits we might as well finish up. But I, personally, mean to wash first. I'm filthy!"

"Oh, why wash?" Roger asked. "You'll only be mucky again afterwards."

"Quite right! Waste of time and soap, I call it!" Roddy backed him up.

"Well, no one's going to feed who isn't decently clean!" Len retorted. "Where's the soap? Oh, and did you leave out a towel when you packed the rest, Margot?"

Rather surprisingly, Margot had remembered. There was a rush for the sink and presently a party of clean and fairly tidy people occupied the verandah and settled down to make a good meal.

By this time, it was practically seventeen hours and they were all tired with their labours. They dallied over their meal with a pleasant feeling of work well done—which, on the whole, was a pity. When their activities ceased, they had time to think; and Ruey had time to remember.

"I'm glad we stayed and finished this after all," she said as she leaned back against the wall of the chalet, sipping daintily at her third cup of coffee. "All the same, I'm thankful to remember that we shan't need to come back until the men come to clear our things. By that time, let's hope the bank robbers have been taken and are safe in prison."

"Don't you worry!" Roddy said with a lazy grin. "They'll do all they know to get clear. They're wanted for murder as well as robbery, remember. By the way, what *do* they do to murderers in these parts? Anyone know?"

"Hang 'em, I should think," Roger replied as he snaffled the last biscuit.

"If it was France, they'd guillotine them," Con announced. "Don't they behead in Germany? Or do they gas them? I'm not sure."

"I believe they shoot them," Len said. "I don't really know, though. Roger did those hikers say if anyone had really been killed?"

"The bank manager was shot dead and there was a rumour that one of the clerks died from his wounds on the way to the hospital. The others were all pretty bad, too from all I could make out. The brutes had a tommy-gun—if that's what they call it out here. They seem to have used it regardless."

Roddy's eyes gleamed wickedly. With one eye on his sister, "Then if they're already wanted for murder, you bet they'll give anyone who tries to catch 'em short shrift," he remarked easily. "Didn't they get away with a wad of cash, too?"

"Over twelve thousand of whatever the coinage is," Roger replied casually.

"The police hereabouts are armed, aren't they?" Stephen asked seriously. "I *say*! If they did meet, *wouldn't* they have a shooting match of it! Oh, boy!"

"Wouldn't it be smashing if they *did* come over the Pass and the cops after them and they caught up with them just about here?" Roddy cried fervently. "Supposing it happened in the next hour or so! We'd get a smashing view of it from here!"

Ruey jumped to her feet. "You shut up!—I think it would be ghastly! Anyhow, I'm not sitting here, listening to you all talking like that, you—you ghouls! Beasts, the lot of you!" And she turned and rushed indoors, nearly falling over Charles who was seated in the doorway and just got out of her way in time.

Roddy stared after her, open-mouthed. "*Well!* What's up with her?" he demanded.

Len was on her feet, too, and going after her. She paused long enough to say, "Ruey's had a pretty sticky time lately, what with Roger's accident and she was nervy during that walk through the mist and then your dad going off as he has done. She's quite right! We *are* beasts to talk like that in front of her when we knew how upset she was about the whole thing! I'm going to her now!" And she vanished.

"*Girls!*" Roddy grunted disgustedly.

For once, he got no encouragement from anyone.

"You pipe down!" Roger said severely. "There's teasing and teasing and you go beyond the limit by a mile when you get going! You let Ruey alone or I'll know the reason why! Drop it—d'ye hear!"

"Well, I like that!" Roddy protested in injured tones. "She started it all, didn't she, talking about our not needing to come again until she hoped the robbers would be taken? It was her own fault!"

"There wasn't any need for you to go nattering on about it and piling on the agony as you did," Con promptly squashed him. "Anyhow, it won't be so long before Papa and Mamma come along and we've got to finish up. Come on, Margot! Let's go and get started with the scrubbing. Roger, you'd better come, too. You'll have to lift the pails off the stove for us, you know. Chas, you and Steve might clear all these things away and fold up the cloth. Anyhow, you're not coming in while we're busy. We're not risking you messing round any more with soap powder!"

She and Margot marched into the chalet, followed by Roger, neither of them taking any further notice of the deflated Roddy who was beginning to sulk over the very crushing treatment he had received. He slid down the handrail of the steps and vanished into the shed where presently, they heard him hammering with vim. Stephen, always obliging, began to gather up the empty cups and carry them in to the sink. Charles, feeling aggrieved at Con's final speech, stalked off to the end of the verandah and stood staring up the Pass. As if it *mattered* about some soapy water on the floor! Normally, he was as sweet-tempered as a boy could be, but when his dignity was upset, he took care to let everyone know it. He ignored the cloth and dirty china and left Stephen to go on clearing up alone.

That placid young man—Joey always declared he was the most placid of all her long family—finished by shaking the crumbs off the cloth and folding it according to his own ideas before coming back to the verandah and settling down with a bit of wood and his knife and going at his favourite occupation of whittling.

From inside came the sound of scrubbing-brushes, being used vigorously. A swishing told that the mop was following. In the Professor's room—and only just in—Roger was perched on one box and writing labels on another while Margot took them as he finished them and stuck them on to the various articles. Stephen turned and craned his neck to peer in, but the girls were at work in the bedrooms, so he could see nothing. He turned back and at that moment Charles gave a queer sound, half gasp, half gulp, and turned to come dashing along the verandah to him.

"Steve! they're here!" he said in a hoarse undertone. "What should we do?"

Stephen sprang up, dropping wood and knife, and peered in the direction in which his young brother was pointing. Sure enough, limping slowly along came two men. They were villainous-looking enough. One had a dirty bandage over one eye. Both had torn clothes and both moved with a dot-and-go-one which seemed to argue that they had been in the wars somewhere. Without pausing to think, Stephen rushed into the house and summoned the others with a loud croak.

"What on earth's the matter?" Len demanded, coming from the door of Ruey's room, scrubbing-brush in hand.

"The robbers! They're coming over the Pass! They'll be here in just a sec! Chas and I both saw them—and they look hurt!"

"*What?*" It came as a chorus, for the rest had come crowding to hear.

Charles had followed his brother in. "We've got to fight them!"

“What with?—Oh, the water! It’s hot enough and full of soap!” Quick-witted Margot snatched up the bucket behind Len. “Come on! If we aim at their heads we ought to blind them for a few minutes with all this lather!”

Roger, who had sped to the side window to look out, turned to cast a wild glance round the party of which he was the eldest. These men were supposed to have guns and had certainly not scrupled to use them. What chance would a crowd of children have against them?

No one gave him any time to make a suggestion. Len grabbed up the bucket Ruey had been using in the boys’ bedroom, and scuttled out to the verandah with it. Con had thoughtfully filled up the two big kettles before they began and put them on to “hot up” the scrubbing water later on. She snatched one and Ruey made a dive for the other and both followed Len out. Infected by the general excitement, Roger armed himself with a long pole that seemed to have come from nowhere. Charles caught up the mop Con had flung down at the news and Stephen, not to be outdone picked up a three-legged stool. Roger took up the post of danger—at the head of the steps and the others lined up along the verandah on either side. A queerer-looking set of defenders, it would have been hard to find.

The whole thing was supremely silly, but they really had worked themselves up more than a little and they were very tired now—too tired to think straight, or they would have realised that even if the oncomers were the bank-robbers, they themselves were behaving ridiculously. As it was, just as the men reached the spot opposite the chalet and turned to cross to it, Margot opened fire before anyone had time to think.

With a wild shriek of, “Clear out! The police are after you!” she heaved up her bucket and flung its soapy and dirty contents straight at the startled newcomers who stood stockstill from the shock. They hadn’t even time to dodge before Len’s followed. Con in her excitement, tossed kettle, boiling water and all, but was too agitated to take aim properly, which was just as well. Ruey poured the contents of hers over the rail and narrowly missed bedewing Roddy who, roused from his sulks by the fearful noise they were all making, had come tearing round the house. Charles put the finishing touch. With a high-pitched screech, he tossed the mop over the railing. By a near miracle, it landed between the legs of the nearer man, bringing him heavily to the ground. Stephen promptly dropped his stool, swarmed over the verandah railing and dropped by his hands, landing safely to tear across the narrow space and fling his whole weight—and he was a solid young man—full in the unfortunate man’s wind, doubling him up and effectually preventing him from taking any further active part in the proceedings. This may have been as well, for he had already ripped out a round half-dozen good English oaths before this happened. The other stood gasping, even as Roger dashed down the steps with a demand that they both surrender forthwith.

Joey and Jack had been strolling along in a leisurely fashion to collect the crowd, but at sound of the yells and screeches that were proceeding from the chalet, both had taken to their heels and run, under the impression that either the party had set fire to the chalet or they were engaged in murdering someone. They arrived on the scene in time to see their eldest son’s exploit and stopped dead, rooted to the ground with amazement. Indeed, it was not until Roger and Roddy between them had ordered the second man to lie flat on the grass and enforced their order, that even the level-headed Jack managed to collect his senses enough to spring forward and demand in no uncertain tones what was the meaning of all this.

He was answered by his third daughter. Waving her empty bucket wildly, Margot yelled, “Those are the murdering bank-robbers and we’ve caught them! Send for the cops and be quick or they may still get away!”

Chapter XIV

“THAT’S HOW IT ALWAYS IS!”

“Never, in all my life,” Joey wrote to her sister, “have I known such an absolute *macédoine* of feelings! Part of me was horrified; part was suffocating with wanting to laugh my head off when I knew I mustn’t; part was really frightened, for I couldn’t know what lay behind the whole thing; and *really*, Madge!

“You never saw such a performance in all your born days! There was one poor lad, crowing like a demented cock, with Steve squatting firmly and heavily on top of him. The other was laid out flat on the ground with Roger and Roddy standing over him while he frothed with strange oaths and Chas, if you please, was in the act of plumping down on his head! Chas, by the way, explained to me later that he’d read somewhere that that was the thing to do when agitated horses fell and kicked. I pointed out with some asperity that you don’t treat men like horses!

“Margot and the other three girls came screeching at us to tell us that these were the murdering bank robbers and they’d caught them and would I dash to the nearest phone and let the police know? Honestly, my dear, for a moment or two I was divided between a conviction that this was a waking nightmare and another that the whole lot had suddenly and totally gone crackers!”

At this point, Joey stopped writing and literally writhed with laughter as she had been doing ever since the night before when they had finally succeeded in straightening things out. Admittedly, it had taken some doing, but at last they had learned that the “robbers” were merely a pair of guileless youths from Birmingham who had been on a walking tour through the Black Forest and Tirol. They had been warned that the Pass was none too safe, but scorned the warning and decided to risk it. They had been involved in a minor landslide which accounted for most of the damage they had sustained, including the injured eye which had been well and truly blacked by a piece of flying stone. The violent reception they had received at the chalet had been the finish. Jack had brought them back to Die Blumen where he attended to the numerous cuts and bruises and scratches the pair had sustained, as well as the eye, which was a nasty one. He had also insisted that they must be fed and lodged for the night, that being, as he pointed out to his agitated wife, the least they could do to make amends for the treatment they had received from the younger members of the Die Blumen party.

They had been thankful to get off to bed and once they had gone, nemesis fell on the would-be captors of bank robbers. Joey had been hard put to it to keep a straight face throughout the time. She had made an effort and contrived to maintain a gravity which had impressed all their juniors from Roger down to Charles with the enormity of their behaviour. But once even Roger had gone off to bed, she had let herself go and laughed until the tears poured down her face and her sides were sore and aching.

Jack had *not* laughed. He had been very angry about the whole thing. He had not said a great deal to any of them, but what he had said had left everyone feeling flayed alive and, which was almost worse, exceedingly foolish. He would listen to no excuses from them. As he pointed out, if the two *had* been the robbers, they might all have been killed or seriously maimed at the very least. In any case it was not *their* business to attack perfect strangers like

that. It was clear that, despite the fact that Roger was more than halfway through his teens and the girls very nearly there, they were no more to be trusted than babies. For the future, they might not go off alone except round about the lake.

By the time he had reached this point, Ruey and Con had been reduced to tears and the other four were severely suppressed. Stephen and Charles had been packed off to bed as quickly as possible and so missed all this. Joey had intervened there and ordered them to bed. She was always rather nervous about Con who was an excitable piece of goods and who had walked in her sleep on a good many occasions when she had been upset.

The next morning, the youths had departed, after having most unwillingly received formal apologies from each one of those concerned in addition to the doctor's own apology. By that time, neither his own family nor the Richardsons had any spirit left in them and when he had pronounced sentence and departed to spend the day with an old friend who was staying at the Stephanie, it was with the full assurance that the whole bunch would behave themselves for at least that day.

Joey finished her laugh and went on with her letter.

"I don't think I ever saw Jack so angry about anything. It was a mad thing to do, of course, for if those two had really been the robbers, they were reported to be armed with tommy-guns and a whole arsenal of weapons and we might now all be lamenting the demise of my five eldest with the Richardsons thrown in for good measure! And just *what* I should have said to Professor Richardson once we could contact him, is more than I can tell you. As a parent, he leaves much to be desired in my opinion; but I imagine that even the most casual of fathers would have had a good deal to say about a holocaust of that kind!

"The whole crowd are properly subdued today. In addition to the very nasty wiggling he gave them all last night, Jack informed them that they could stay at home for today and see to the house. So Anna and the Coadjutor are visiting Innsbruck at this moment while the four girls are acting nursemaids to Geoff and Phil and the boys are busy peeling potatoes for tonight's meal. Jack insisted that our handmaids should have a whole holiday while our young criminals did all their chores for them. This morning, they—the girls—did the cooking, made the beds, swept and dusted. The boys were set to sawing up and chopping some logs for the stove, all except Chas who woke up very white and all eyes. I had to go to him twice during the night and wake him from nightmares, so he's spending the day in the swing-hammock and under orders to sleep all he can.

"I was a little afraid that all the excitement might set Con off sleep-walking again, but she got through the night all right. I popped in on her each time I had to go to Chas and she was sleeping like the dead. It begins to look as if she were going to outgrow that tendency *at last*! But, needless to say, Jack was none too sweet about our disturbed night. However, I'm hoping that a quiet day today will put Chas all right. The twins are beginning to give warning that teeth are on the way. They're dribbling like water-spouts and inclined to be whimpery, poor pets! On the whole, I haven't been sorry for having every kind of job taken off my hands today. I had a good long nap this afternoon, so if I'm for it tonight, I can cope comfortably.

"Don't get up a new worry about me. Apart from the fact that I've kept on giggling at intervals whenever I think of that sensational scene on which we landed, it hasn't affected me at all. The only real regret I have is that no one had a camera handy at the time. If only Jack had had his ciné, we could have got some pricelessly funny pictures! And don't begin to go hairless in case the bank robbers come along and invade us. They've been caught. At least, two of them have been. The third won't trouble anyone any further in this wicked world. The

radio this morning told us that the police caught up with them some distance from these parts and there was a shooting-match, during which Number Three, to quote Roddy—strictly after Jack departed—got his all right.”

Joey wound up her letter with messages to everyone and then enveloped and addressed it.

“There’s one thing certain,” she mused as she licked her stamps thoroughly. “They’ll have to close the Tiern Pass to all traffic, foot or otherwise. It isn’t really needed, now they’ve built the new autobahn and, from all I can hear, it’s a menace these days. Thank goodness we never thought of taking the crowd along there for a picnic!” She turned her envelope over and wrote her name and address on the back as most European countries sensibly expect. Then she shoved pen and pad into a drawer of her desk, jumped and went out of the salon, remarking aloud, “Well, *that* job is done! What’s the next thing?”

When she saw the clock, she decided that the next thing was obviously Kaffee und Kuchen. It was sixteen hours. She deposited the letter on the table in the hall so that anyone going to the Post at the other side of the lake would see it and take it along. Then she turned to make her way to the kitchen.

“I’ll get it all ready and then yell to some of them to come and carry it out into the garden,” she thought. “Let’s hope Jack returns from his visit with Angus McAlpine in a sweeter frame of mind! The kids have had all they need in the way of a doing and I don’t want more than today spoilt for them. In fact, I’m going to see what I can do to finish it off cheerfully. Let’s think! Oh, I know! The very thing!” And she skipped the rest of the way to the kitchen in a manner more befitting one of her daughters than the mother of a long family of eleven!

In the kitchen, she found that she had been forestalled. Margot and Ruey were there, finishing off big trays of crockery and “eats” to carry out into the garden. Con was watching the coffee as it came up. She half-turned from the stove as Joey pushed the door open.

“Nearly ready!” she announced. “Did you have a good sleep?”

“I did, thank you. I’ve also written a full account to your Auntie Madge of yesterday’s affair. It’s on the hall table if anyone goes to the Post later. I came to see about Kaffee und Kuchen, but you girls have been too quick for me. Is Len with the babies? Have they been all right this afternoon?”

“Slept most of the time,” Margot said, filling a plate with fancy bread twists. “They were just beginning to wake up when we came in to see about this. They’ll probably want changing, though, and Len said they must have fresh bibs.”

“Right! You carry on here and I’ll go and see to it.” Joey went out of the kitchen and presently returned, a baby on each arm. Len was following her to help carry the trays.

“We won’t be long. Get their milk, will you, Len, and set it on to warm. It’ll be just on time when we get back. Ruey, would you like to give Phil her bottle?”

“Oh, may I?” Ruey asked eagerly. “I’d just love it!”

“O.K. That’s settled, then. Come along, my precious pets! Mamma will make you comfy and nice and then you shall have a bottle each when we come back. Get everything out into the garden, girls. It doesn’t take me long. I’ve had plenty of practice, goodness knows! And after we’ve finished and cleared up, I have a gorgeous plan for us all.”

“Oh, what?” Margot and Con exclaimed together; but she only shook her head, laughing, and went out and upstairs with the babies and the four girls turned their attention to carrying out the trays.

When she came down again, they attacked her eagerly, but she flatly refused to tell them anything.

"It won't hurt you to wait.—Ruey, bubble that baby, or she'll bubble herself and then you'll be sorry! You can't expect her to go at her bottle wholesale. She must have an interval to get up any wind—Oh, show her, Margot!"

Margot showed the stunned Ruey how to lay little Phil over her shoulder and pat her gently on the back to get up any wind she might have sucked with the milk.

"You always have to do that," she explained. "Yes; let her have the rest now."

"Gosh!" Ruey exclaimed. "I didn't know there was so much to it."

When the twins had finished and had been laid in the play-pen to kick and chuckle as they lay on the groundsheet, Ruey, and Len, who had taken expert care of little Geoff, set to work to eat their share of Anna's twists and buns and cakes. When no one could eat any more, Joey jumped up. "Now I'll clear!" she cried.

"Oh no, you won't!" Margot was even quicker. She looked at her mother anxiously. "Are you feeling all right? Not tired or worried or anything?"

Joey laughed as she gave way and sat down again. "Fit as a fiddle! Don't you bother about me, my lambs! I'm quite well now. Ruey, take that aged look off your face at once! Listen to me, all of you. What's done is done. You thoroughly deserved the momentous ticking-off you got and I'm not sympathising with you over it in the least. It served you all right for being such utter young goops. But in this family, you Three R's, we don't hark back to past sins. You'll hear no more about it from *us*. I can promise you that. Now let's clear up and *then* you shall hear my scheme for brightening up the end of the day."

In less than ten minutes, the clearing up was done and Joey ordered everyone back to the garden while she went to her study to fetch something. She arrived in their midst waving a bunch of long narrow slips of paper in one hand and a sheaf of pencils in the other. Her own family set up shouts of acclamation at the sight.

"Paper games!" Len cried. "Oh, gorgeous! We haven't played any for ages!"

"Oh, goody—goody—goody!" Margot chanted.

The boys cheered and Con sighed rapturously, "Oh, *can* we do BOOK REVIEWS?"

"BOOK REVIEWS, and NOT NIGHTMARES, and WORD AND MEANING and the KATY GAME—if we have time," Joey added prudently as she dealt out a slip and a pencil to each of them. "Got something to write on? Good! You three, do you know BOOK REVIEWS?"

"Never heard of it," Roger grinned. "Our tongues are hanging out of our mouths with curiosity, though!"

"O.K. Write down the title of a book—no, Ruey; not a real one. A made-up title, like—well—THE TERROR OF THE PACIFIC, for instance."

"Can do." Roger bent over his paper frowning a moment. Then he scribbled rapidly and sat awaiting instructions.

"Fold it over," Joey said, "and hand on to your left-hand neighbour. Now write 'or' and give an alternative title, like—well, er—TRIPS BY MOTOR-COACH."

This done, they had to give the author who must be a real person—a real author if they liked. Ruey chuckled to herself as she set her chosen name down. The name of the publisher came next and after that, they had two reviews to write, then the papers were folded for the last time, tossed into the middle of the circle and each drew one, having been first forbidden to unfold them until they were told.

"I'll read out first to show you how it goes," Joey said, unrolling her slip. She cast her eye over it and promptly collapsed into such heartfelt giggles that everyone else was on the tiptoe of excitement.

"What *is* it?" Len demanded eagerly. "Don't sit there, giggling and enjoying yourself all by yourself! Read it to us!"

With an effort, Joey pulled herself together and solemnly read aloud the following rignarole: "THE CASTAWAYS ON CANNIBAL ISLAND or NEVER GIVE A DOG PIGMEAT by William Shakespeare. Published by the London University Press. Review I: 'This is an excellent cookery book, full of tips and hints that are little-known and of great value to every young housekeeper.' Review II: 'We found this book too sentimental and recommend the author to take a course of Jane Austen before attempting to write another romantic novel.' "

The entire party was convulsed with laughter. Charles even rolled over and over with merriment and it was some minutes before Ruey, who came next, could control herself sufficiently to read out *her* slip.

"THE BLOODSTAINED BREADKNIFE or EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY by Josephine M. Bettany," she began, whereat Joey gave a shriek of dismay and her own family applauded loudly. When they were quiet again, Ruey went on: "Published by the Nonsuch Press. Review I: 'This book is rotten.' Review II: 'A most charming and delicate love story, written with real poetic feeling.' " After which, she doubled up again and the others copied her.

"Who," demanded Joey when she was grave again, "pitched on *me* for author?"

"Me," Ruey said sweetly.

"It was Roddy, who wrote the first review," remarked Charles, peeping over Ruey's shoulder. "Couldn't you do better than that?" he gave Roddy a severe look.

Roddy looked sheepish. "Well, I've never read a book review in my life and I didn't know how to do it. Anyway, I knew the rest of you would most likely be buttering the books up all ends, so I thought I'd make a change."

"Ho! That's all you know!" Stephen said with scorn. "Get cracking, Len! You're next."

Len's, however, proved to be very humdrum and the one Charles had was no better. Con's turn came next and she glanced down her slip with a startled expression and the dimples in her cheeks deepening noticeably, though she was as grave as a judge when she began to read. However, her voice was pitched two full tones higher than usual and her mother knew the moment she began that she was only just restraining her giggles.

"THE GRAVES OF A HOUSEHOLD or WASTE NOT, WANT NOT by Rudyard Kipling. Published by Sheed and Ward. Review I: 'An excellent handbook for hikers.' Review II: 'This writer should learn that pages descriptive of scenery in a book of this kind are mere padding and not acceptable.' "

Con had lifted the last review bodily from a comment on one of her school essays by Miss Derwent, the senior English mistress and it brought down the house. Jack Maynard, strolling along the road from the Seehof where he had had a refreshing visit with his old friend, heard the yells of laughter some distance away and quickened his steps to find out what was happening now. When he heard and had had all the reviews read out for his benefit, he insisted on joining in the game. Much to the relief of the Richardsons, he seemed to have recovered from his previous rage and, far from acting as a restraint on the wildest ideas in the games which followed he out did most of them. By the time Anna, who, with Rösli, had come home

shortly before the twins were put to bed, called them in to supper, they were all crimson and wet-eyed with laughter, not to mention their aching sides.

“Your dad seems to have forgotten he was downright mad with us,” Ruey commented to Margot as she sat on the side of the bath, waiting until that young woman had finished brushing her teeth.

Margot gave her mouth a final rinse and washed out her toothbrush before she replied, “Well we told you that was how it always is—at least, Mother did. Goodness, Ruey, no one can go *on* being mad with you forever.”

“Some people can!” Ruey said ruefully. “I don’t believe our maths mistress has ever forgotten a single mad thing any of us did in maths. She was always yanking them up and throwing them at us when she lost her hair over our work.”

“You won’t find that sort of thing happening at the Chalet School,” Margot rejoined. “It just isn’t done. All the same,” she went on, reverting to Ruey’s earlier statement, “I’ll never again assume anyone’s a murderer unless I know jolly well he *is*—or she is, if it’s a her!” With which highly ungrammatical remark, she picked up her towels and sponge-bag and yawned her way off to bed, leaving Ruey, the last of the crowd to wash, to finish and join Len in their room where that lady was already in bed and half asleep.

And that night, Joey had a long and peaceful night, for Con did not walk in her sleep; Charles had no nightmares; even the twins slumbered peacefully, the coming teeth giving them a little peace for the time being.

Chapter XV

NEWS ALL ROUND

It was the middle of the morning. Stephen and Charles had been sent round to the Post Hotel at Briesau which was post office for the whole area, to ask for any mail there might be for Die Blumen. Everyone else was busy finishing off the daily chores, for Joey had always insisted that as soon as they could be any help whatsoever, her children must take their share of the jobs. As soon as the Richardsons had settled in, they had been handed their quota and no one might play until every task was done. Jack Maynard, the only member of the family to have finished, was lounging in the doorway, smoking his pipe when the boys came tearing up to the house, triumphantly waving bunches of correspondence for everyone.

"Hand over!" he said. "Now keep still, both of you." He raised his voice in a long melodious yodel, winding up with, "*Posty!*"

Everyone promptly left everything and converged on the hall where he now stood beside the table, sorting out the packets. Joey, who had been bathing little Phil, arrived with her in a big towel. Margot with a shriek, shot along from the kitchen where she had been stoning plums for Anna. Len and Con, busy with the dusting of the bedrooms, slid down the bannisters and Ruey, whose turn it was for the bathroom, came with polish canister in one hand and cloth in the other. Roger and Roddy had been shaving down sticks as kindlings for Anna who insisted on using the old-fashioned charcoal stove for her cakes and pastry, though she condescended to the brand-new electric cooker Jack had installed for everything else.

The cause of all the excitement grinned as he scanned the motley crew. "Stand easy, the lot of you! Now don't natter and give me time to sort these out. Joey, at least ten letters for you and a parcel that looks like some kid's M.S. for you to vet."

Joey pulled a face as she took the parcel and scanned the address which was written in an untidy script hand. "That wretched infant from Rochdale! This is the third M.S. she's sent me since I wrote and told her to go ahead and some day she might write a book that a publisher would take. Either she spends most of her days at it or else she's resurrecting all her old ones by degrees for my benefit! That all for me? Because if so, I'll go back to the nursery and finish abluting this infant. At least she's abluted all right, but she's still to powder and dress, aren't you, my precious?" She dropped a kiss on the top of the small head and Phil burst into chuckles and made a clutch at her mother's hair.

"Oh *no*, you don't!" Joey hurriedly removed the chubby fingers. "I don't want to have to bother about doing it over again until I change. Come on, lambie pie! We'll go and finish you off, shall we?" And still clutching her handful of mail, she climbed the stair again.

Jack cast a grin after her and turned again to his task. "Len—Con—Margot! Letters for each of you. Yours is from Australia, Margot!"

A wild shriek of excitement greeted this announcement as Margot took her letter. "From Emmy! Oh, goody! I thought I'd be hearing soon!" Then she shot off to her own room to devour the lengthy and ungrammatical epistle from her greatest friend, Emerence Hope, who had left school at the end of the previous term to go home to Australia, since she was as far up the school as she was likely to go and her parents had decided that at seventeen, she had had enough school.^[10]

Len smiled sympathetically as she took her own letter. "Poor old Margot! She and Emmy were so all in all to each other. She's going to feel jolly well left this next term, I'm afraid." Then she saw the address on her own letter. "From Josette—at *last*! She's the world's worst correspondent!"

"Here's a card for you," her father interrupted. "Ted, isn't it? I see it's from Guernsey. Didn't you say she was going there for the hols?"

"I did! Yes; it's Ted all right." Len turned it over. "I wish *we* could go there some time. We've never seen it since we left when we three were tiny babies."

"You'll have to wait till our ship comes in. It would cost the earth to take a family like ours to Guernsey from Switzerland," her father said, laughing.

Len was not attending. She was already slitting open her envelope and pulling out the sheets closely written in her cousin Josette's characteristic hand. "It *is*! A full account of Auntie Madge over Mamma's letter! Got all yours, Con? Then come on and share this."

They raced upstairs as their father went on, "One for you, Roger. That's your dad's fist all right. *No* one could mistake it!" He handed it over. "I'm glad that's come at last. I know you folk said he wasn't given to writing letters, but he'd gone off into the blue and if we wanted to get hold of him, it might prove a sticky job."

Roger took it with inward eagerness. It was all very well, but he had been feeling that his father had behaved very coolly, to say the least of it, to go off as he had done, leaving his family dumped on the Maynards. It was true that the Maynards had become their guardians during his absence, but the Professor might have done things decently and in order while he was about it. It was quite a relief to him to recognise the small, neat and almost illegible characters of the writing. He looked round to catch the eyes of Roddy and Ruey, but the doctor was handing Ruey a big square envelope at sight of which she grimaced as wildly as ever Joey had done.

"From Kenya! That's the Head! What on earth can she want with me now?"

"Perhaps she likes you and wants to say she's sorry you aren't going back," Charles suggested. "People *are* queer, you know!"

Before Ruey could retaliate for this piece of cheek, Stephen was asking, "Can I have the stamp when you're done with it? It would come in for a swap and I'm getting jolly short of swops."

"Have it and welcome!" Ruey opened the envelope, tore off the stamped corner and handed it to him. "There you are. I've got some more when the things come from Croydon. I'll give them to you when they do."

"Oh, thanks a lot. Sure you won't want them yourself?"

"Oh, goodness, no! I stopped collecting ages ago. Never very keen, anyhow. You can have them all right—my album, too, if it comes."

"Smashing! You are a good chap, Ruey!"

She laughed as she turned and skipped through the open doorway. Roger and Roddy had already disappeared that way and she guessed they had gone to seek refuge in the summerhouse at the far end of the garden. Her father's letters always took some deciphering and Roger had remarked only the previous holidays that his dad's writing was going from bad to worse and soon no one would be able to make out a thing he wrote. Jack chuckled, handed

Charles a batch for the kitchen and a card for himself from a friend and then vanished into the study with his own sizable collection.

By the time Ruey joined the boys—pausing on the way to capture a handful of mulberries from the tree at the side of the summerhouse, Roger had slit open the envelope with his penknife and was spreading out the two sheets closely filled with the tiny very neat scrawl which was a puzzle to most people.

“What’s he say?” she demanded, tucking her own correspondence into the big patch pocket on the back of her slacks.

“Give us a chance! I’ve just got it open and you ought to know by this time that trying to read his fist is like trying to unravel a Chinese puzzle,” Roger grunted.

“Well, get on with it now, anyhow. Where is he?” Ruey picked up the envelope and studied the stamp and postmark with interest. “I can’t make head or tail of this. The stamp’s all inky and the postmark’s smudged. I’ll take the stamp for Steve, anyhow. He *may* be able to guess where it comes from and if he has it already, it’ll do for another swop, at least. Where *is* Dad, Roge?”

Roger shook his head. “Search *me*! Here! What do *you* make of it?” And he thrust the letter at his sister who examined the scrawl that purported to be the address with dropping jaw.

“My great-aunt Jerusha! Does he really expect people to read *that*? It’s nothing but a lot of angles varied by an odd curve. How can you make a thing like that mean anything?” She handed it back. “It’s beyond me. Better go on and come back to it later.”

“Isn’t that a Y at the end there?” Roddy asked, putting a stubby and none too clean forefinger on it. “And that thing’s a T. There’s the cross-line.”

“If you ask me,” Roger said as he studied the sheet, “we’ll have to get one of those arche-what-you-may-call-um chaps on to it. The chaps that swot up hieroglyphics I mean. I should say young Geoff could do nearly as well if you gave him a sheet of paper and a biro and left him to it!”

“Hardly, at not quite three months old,” Ruey murmured. “But it really is *awful*! Can’t you read *any* of it?”

Roger frowned fiercely at it. “It begins, ‘My dear Roger’—but I know that bit. It goes on—so far as I can make out—‘I regretted’—or d’ye think it’s ‘received’?” he appealed to the other two.

“Might be either,” Roddy declared. “Best go on and see if the sense of it tells you.”

To Roger’s mind, the rest of it looked like being completely undecipherable, but he did his best, aided by wild guesses from the other two: none of which did them much good so far as getting at what the Professor meant. Ruey wrote down what they thought in Roddy’s notebook and when they had done their best with the first paragraph, she sat back and groaned loudly.

“It’s no use! It doesn’t make sense! Just listen!” And she read aloud:

“‘My dear Roger—I regretted going with the package but the rabbit had lost his ticket.’ Well, that’s what we’ve got down!” as both her brothers sniggered loudly at this. “I told you it didn’t make sense—Oh, Len! Are you or Con any good at reading ghastly writing?”

Len and Con had come to the summerhouse to seek her and share with her their cousin Josette’s letter. Both were flushed and giggling and at her anxious query, both shook their heads.

“Not a sausage!” Len said cheerfully. “We’ve brought Josette’s letter to share with you. Such a yell! The ceiling of the Speisesaal at home came down at the beginning of the hols and Mamma said she was going to write to Auntie Madge as she’d been sleeping in the bedroom

over it and say it was her additional weight that had done it and she expected her to pay for the repairs and would send her the bill when it came in,” Len bubbled between giggles. “I wrote to Josette to warn her and ask her to let us know how Auntie reacted when she got Mamma’s letter. That was ages ago, but Josette’s the limit about letters and she’s just got round to answering now. It’s a complete scream, by the way.”

“Is your aunt *very* fat?” Ruey asked with pardonable curiosity.

“Oh, not so very—more chubby. But she *has* put on weight this last year and is she mad about it!” Con giggled. “But it hasn’t been Josette’s fault that she couldn’t write sooner, Len.” She turned to her sister. “You know she says Kevin and Kester have had measles. She’s never had it herself and Uncle Jem shoved the whole family into quarantine once they knew what was wrong with the twins. Ailie got it, but Josette and Sybs escaped and David—he’s the eldest, Rue—wasn’t at home at the time and Auntie Madge rang up and told him to stay away until they were clear again. Read them the letter, Len. It’s frightfully funny.”

“Aren’t you busy, though?” Len asked doubtfully.

“Not so’s you’d notice.” Roger folded up the puzzling sheets and shoved them into his shirt pocket. “I’m going to borrow a reading-glass and see if I can make out anything with that. Pa’s writing gets noticeably worse, every letter he sends. Anyhow, I can’t make anything out of the thing except—and this is a guess—that he wants me to send him something that was in the safe, though *what* is anyone’s guess. Here!” He pulled out the sheets again and handed them to Len. “What do *you* say it is? That sixth line down—*there!*”

The two curly heads came together over the sheet. After a prolonged stare at the word in question, Con said tentatively, “It sounds quite mad, but could it be—‘*dogfight*’? For that’s the only thing I can make of it.”

“It looks more to me like ‘log night,’” Len said, scowling at it darkly. “Oh! I’ve got it! It’s ‘logbook.’ *Does* he keep a logbook, Roger?”

“Not that I know of. He may for all I can tell you. But I don’t think that last word’s ‘book.’ It’s too long.”

“Don’t matter that I can see,” Roddy struck in. “We can’t make head or tail of the address, so if we knew fifty times over what it is he wants, we couldn’t send it.”

“Ask Papa to have a shot,” Con suggested. “Why don’t you? You know how abominably doctors write as a rule, so he ought to be able to make out anything in that line.”

“If he can make sense of this, he’s a genius, then,” Roger said sourly. “It’s beyond me. O.K.; we’ll do that and hope for the best. Carry on with your own letter, Len. Ruey’s dying to hear it and Roddy and I haven’t finished Anna’s kindlings. Come on, young Rod! We’d better go and get on with it.”

The two boys went off and Len gave a deep chuckle as she opened her letter. “If Roger thinks it’ll be boring, that’s where he’s missed the bus. However, it’s *his* affair. Ready, Ruey?”

Ruey nodded, and Len, perched on the little rustic table inside the summerhouse read her cousin Josette’s account aloud, punctuating it at intervals with further chuckles. Ruey and Con joined in. Josette wrote fluently, once she began.

“Dearest Len, Thanks a lot for warning me well beforehand, I’ve made it my business to be on hand when Posty arrived each mail day and was on the spot the day it did come. Incidentally, that was also the day Kevin and Kester came down with measles, which accounts for the long delay in replying. Sorry, but Daddy had us all shoved into quarantine the instant he knew what was wrong as we’ve never had it. David was away, staying with a pal, so he

escaped. Sybs and I escaped, too, but young Ailie had it and looked like the spotted wonder of a freak show!

“To return to our mutttons, as the French are supposed to say!

“Being on the spot, I collected the letters and handed them over at the breakfast table. The twins were in the nursery, of course, but we three and Mummy and Daddy were all there. He dished the letters out. There were none for me, so I could give all my mind to Mummy. She was awfully pleased to get Auntie Jo’s letter, especially as the first part seems to have been all about Tirol and what a gaudy time she was having.

“Oh, it *was* a yell! There was Mummy murmuring at intervals, ‘This is doing Jo all the good in the world—What a jolly time they seem to be having!—*Dear* little Tiernsee!’—and so on. Then she turned another page and—did she blow up! She went right up the walls and what she had to say was worth hearing. I’m putting down all I can remember, but Daddy wouldn’t allow me to post all the time we were in quarantine and of course young Ailie had to lengthen *that*! She started the very last possible day, just when Mummy was patting herself on the back because it looked like being only the twins after all.

“Well, she was *furious*—after all, she’s only a few pounds over ten stone, even now—nothing like the size Auntie Mollie was when we were all juniors—remember?

“She literally exploded. ‘Oh, if *only* I had Jo here! I’d *teach* her to libel me like this! Jem! Listen to this!’ And then she read aloud what Auntie had written. She was wild, I don’t think she even remembered us three. In case you didn’t see Auntie Jo’s letter before she sent it, it was more or less that she was very sorry to have to say that Mummy’s extra weight had been too much for Freudesheim and as a result, the ceiling in the Speisesaal had come down. Naturally, Mummy would wish to pay for the damage, so the bill should be sent on to her to deal with when it came in. There was some more, but that was the gist of it.

“Daddy didn’t improve matters by howling with laughter. Of course, Sybs and I were tying ourselves up in knots, and Mummy was completely ravers! And then young Ailie had to say, ‘But, Mummy, I know you’re a lot fatter than you used to be, but you *couldn’t* be as fat as all that! Why, it would mean you weighed more than Len and Con and Margot, all put together!’

“That was where Daddy choked badly and we had to fly round and pat him on the back and Mummy had to give him another cup of coffee. Then she got up and she was raging clear through. She stalked to the door. Then she turned round and said, ‘You’re a set of utter heathen! And as for Jo, *she* can’t talk! She’s put on enough this year herself, so the less she says, the better! Fat, indeed! I’ll show you!’ ”

“But you couldn’t call Auntie Joey *fat*!” Ruey cried, breaking in on the reading. “No one could! I think she’s just right for her height! If she was much thinner, she’d look a perfect scrag!”

“Yes; but Auntie Madge is at least four inches shorter,” Len explained. “I suppose it shows more on her. Anyhow after that, Auntie Madge said she was going to see to it that she was slim enough by the time Peggy’s wedding-day came——”

“Who’s Peggy?” Ruey asked.

Con enlightened her. “She’s another cousin—one of Uncle Dick’s eldest. At least, she and Rix are. They’re twins, you see. Peg’s to be married to Giles Winterton at the end of October—our half-term week-end, in fact. We three and Peggy’s own sisters, Bride and Maeve—you’ll meet Maeve at school, but Bride’s grown up—and Sybs and Josette are all to be bridesmaids, along with his sisters, Polly and Lala. Ailie is to be train-bearer. It’s the first

wedding in our lot and Auntie Mollie said that as Peggy was going to be so far away, living in Canada for the present, she meant to make it an Occasion.”

“Gosh! *More* twins!” Ruey said incredulously.

“We’ve twins in the family.” Con told her. “Auntie Madge and Uncle Dick are twins and so was Grandpa Bettany. Now let Len finish the letter or someone is sure to be yelling for us to do something or go somewhere. Get on to it, Len!”

Thus adjured, Len read the last of the letter. “Anyhow, the latest is that Mummy means to take a water cure somewhere or other where they guarantee to bring you down by pounds in a week. Daddy told her it was a lot of rot and she suited *him* all right just as she was. But she’s dug her toes in this time. I expect by the time Peggy’s wedding heaves along, she’ll be a regular sylph?

“I must finish. I’ve got to go to the farm for eggs so I’ll post this as I go through the village. Be seeing you. Josette.

“P.S. I nearly forgot to tell you the latest and biggest piece of news. Who do you think is engaged now? *Bride Bettany!!!* He’s a young barrister whose sister is a pal of hers—name of Carrington—Simon Gregory Carrington. Imagine Bride Mrs. Simon Carrington! They won’t be married for a while yet as he’s not much more than at the beginning, but Daddy says he’ll do O.K. The next thing, I suppose, will be our own Sybs producing a young man. She’s eighteen and I heard Daddy tell Mummy she’d have to keep a look-out if she didn’t want to miss her eldest girl quickly, as Sybs was a regular honeypot! Isn’t it *awful?*”

At this point, Joey’s golden voice came ringing across the garden: “Girls—Len—Con—Ruey! Where are you? Come quickly! I’ve news for you!”

“That’s Mamma! Come on! She sounds completely thrilled!” Con started to her feet and led the wild race to the house where Joey was awaiting them, Margot beside her and the boys and Jack a little behind.

“I’ve news with a capital N!” she announced when they were all there. “First of all, Auntie Madge isn’t bringing the babies back after all. She’s struck all of a heap by my comments on her extra weight and she’s off to take a reducing course. *But* Daisy and Laurie Rosomon are coming for a fortnight’s holiday and to show us how their young Tony has grown *and* their latest effort who is three months now, so they’ll collect up our quartette and bring them along with them. But that isn’t all. Auntie Madge says Bride is engaged now!”

“Oh, we knew that already,” Len said airily. “Josette told us—in a postscript. She said she nearly forgot it. I’ll give you her letter to read and you can see what really happened when Auntie Madge got your letter.”

“Wait till I see Josette! Skimming the cream like that! Oh, well, the last piece of news is that as the pack will be on us on Monday, we have only two days left for expeditions. Once we have all the nursery fry here, there’ll be no going far afield, remember. So Papa says he’s going to take you crowd to Hall today to visit the salt mines there. How’s that?”

With one voice, they all yelled, “O.K.!” and the unexpected noise caused two innocent tourists who happened to be strolling past at that moment to jump violently and set the echoes on the far side of the lake flying.

Chapter XVI

AN EXCITING TRIP

There was a general outcry when they understood that Joey herself was not coming with them on this trip.

“But why not?” Len demanded. “Don’t you feel fit?” with sudden anxiety.

“Fit as a fiddle. Stop *worrying*, you young poop! Just you give your brain a little exercise. We have exactly two days in which to get everything ready for Daisy and Co, because I’m not leaving anything till Monday. I know Daisy and Laurie!”

The triplets giggled whole-heartedly at this. The young Rosomons rarely if ever stuck to a timetable. They might turn up first thing in the morning, or they might not arrive until midnight. The girls understood why their mother was determined to leave nothing to chance. All the same, it was hard luck if she had to miss anything as exciting as a visit to the salt mines and they said so.

“Keep cool—keep cool!” Joey returned with aggravating calm. “I’ve been through them more than once in my salad days. Apart from that, we’ve some turning round to do to fit every one in. I must say I wish that when those folk took over the chalet they’d left it as it was. They could quite well have cut off the wing where most of the formrooms and dormies used to be and let it separately. As it is, we’re going to have to crowd. Margot, you must go in with Con, and Roddy and Steve can double up in your room. Then Chas and Mike can have theirs and the twins—I mean Felix and Felicity, of course—must go to the night nursery and so must Tony Rosomon. That leaves the big guest room for Daisy and Laurie and the baby. Now scram and tell Ruey and the boys to get ready. Slacks and woolly jumpers and take blazers or cardigans with you as well.”

“What about eats?” Con asked.

“Papa will feed you in Hall. That’s *his* job. Now be off! Anna and Rösli and I are going to have a field day of it and the sooner you crowd are out of the way, the better I shall be pleased. Get cracking!”

They scuttled off and ten minutes later saw them marching down the short garden path to the road, headed by Jack. Joey stood at the door to see them off. Just as Roger, the tail of the procession, was passing through the gate, she remembered something. With a yowl like a wild cat deprived of its young, she shot down the path and grabbed his arm. “Hang on a sec! I want that letter from your dad, Roger. Give it to me and I’ll see if I can work it out while I have my afternoon rest. I might manage to elucidate a sentence here and there. I’m quite good at puzzles!”

Roger clapped his hand to his breast-pocket. “Oh, lawks! It’s upstairs in my other blazer. Hang on a sec, and I’ll fetch it.”

“No—no! Tell me where it is and I’ll get it! You’ll miss the train if you dally much longer.”

“Somewhere in our room,” he returned with a wicked grin at her. “O.K. Thanks a million!” Then he shot off after the rest who were racing along, for they had left things rather late and it would take them all their time to catch the little rack and pinion train down to Spärtz in the valley where they would meet the Kufstein-Innsbruck express.

They did manage it—with less than ten seconds to spare. It was packed with tourists making for the Innthal (Inn valley), but somehow they squeezed in and finally reached Spärtz just before the train from Kufstein came thundering in. This was less crowded and they got seats altogether by dint of sitting in each other's laps. Jack took a daughter on each knee and Len had Ruey. Roger nursed Charles and Roddy and Stephen sat on each other. By the time they were settled, the train was off again, and they were en route for Hall.

"Uncle Jack, what else is there to see besides the mines?" Ruey asked.

"Oh, quite a good deal. It's a very old town. Its charter dates from 1303," Jack said, having primed himself the night before when Joey had first suggested this excursion to him. He knew his family—and he now included the Richardsons with them! "In 1477, they had a Mint and you can still see the Münzerthurm which Sigismund the Rich in Cash established for the job. That's in the Unterstadt."

"D'you mean they still mint money there?" Roger asked incredulously.

"No, no. The last silver minted there was what is called the Hofer coinage, minted by Andreas Hofer who helped to free Tirol from the French. That was in 1809. The silver came from Schawz where we'll hope to take you some time, though hardly these holidays, I'm afraid."

"Are there *silver* mines in Tirol as well as salt?" Ruey asked in awed tones.

"There are. Likewise, in Styria, away to the east, you get rich iron mines. However, it's a salt mine we're going to see today. Styria must wait a while. Even I have never been there."

"And anyway, Styria is a different province," Con said. "What's Hall like, Papa? What other old places has it?"

"It's divided into two towns, the Unterstadt or Lower Town and the Oberstadt or Upper Town, Chas and Steve. It's high time you boys knew more German!" as his sons looked at him. "You get from one to the other by flights of stone steps. Some of them actually go through the houses built on the slopes. You enter by an arched doorway, through a little tunnel and then there you are in a sunny square or street. The parish church and the Rathaus are in the upper town. There's another thing you'll like to see," he went on, warming to his task, "and that's the little arches that fly across the streets from one house to another. And if we're in luck, you three Richardsons, we'll see people wearing the old national dress of Tirol."

"Ooh, how thrilling!" Ruey cried, "Oh, I do hope we do!"

"I'm making no promises," he said, twinkling at her. "When Mamma and I lived here years ago and the school was in Briesau, it was quite a common sight. But there's been a major world war since then and everywhere has been turned upside down."

"Oh, I *hope* it hasn't stopped people from wearing the national dress!" Len said wistfully. "You see next to nothing of it up at Tiernsee because, of course, it's a tourist centre and everyone is too busy working."

"Well, you never know your luck. Keep your eyes skinned. That's the best I can do for you!"

The girls made up their minds to do so and were simply enchanted when, as they were walking through the streets of the lower town, headed for the bus station, they were met by a tall, middle-aged woman, swinging a couple of great bags filled with fruit and vegetables, and clad in a dress of black, long and full-skirted. But it was not a sombre get-up by any means, for sprigs of flowers—cornflowers, poppies, alpenroses, globe-flowers—were embroidered all over it and the tight, square-neck bodice was fastened with oval buttons of deep red to match the poppies. The sleeves were puffed and rucked. Over the front of her skirt was a brilliant red

apron gathered to immense fullness by rows of shirring, and a red scarf was knotted round her throat and the ends folded in at the neck of the bodice. Her hat was of black velour, shaped like an old-fashioned “boater” and was adorned with loops and streamers of gay ribbon. It was, as Len observed later, “black with a difference.” From her ears swung big gold hoops and a treble string of tiny gold beads lay on the folds of the red scarf.

“Oh, how simply gorgeous!” Ruey gasped as they met.

The woman caught the meaning of the girl’s tones, even though she did not understand the words, and her lips parted in a smile that showed magnificent teeth gleaming in her nut-brown face before she gave them the pretty Tirolean greeting, “Gruss Gott!” The Maynards returned it as Jack swung off his hat. The other males, having none on, saluted smartly and she laughed outright.

“Gaudy get-up!” Roddy commented as they went on to where the shabby miners’ bus was waiting for passengers.

Jack laughed. “The Tirolese love gaiety. All Austrians do. It’s the fundamental difference between them and the Germans. They see no reason to leave gay colours to the young. I’ve seen an old man, well up in the seventies, with a bunch of flowers and a tall feather in his hat. And when you go to any of their great festivals—a wedding, for instance—it’s amazing to see the energy with which elderly men and women join in the Schuhplättler! And they aren’t dances for the languid, let me tell you! They play hard and they have to work hard, too. Tirol is a poor country and the war made things fifty times worse, though these are better days for them, thank goodness! Here’s the bus. *Hup* you go, Charlie-boy!” And he tossed up Charles into the bus. The rest followed and then they were off and for the next thirty or forty minutes, they had plenty to amuse them in the landscape as they rolled along the Salzstrasse.

They were quickly clear of the town and heading for the grey mountains where the salt mines lie. Now and then, they went through a patch of dark pines, but for the best part of the way, there was nothing between them and the misty peaks and crags. At one side of the road, the tiny Wiessenbach brawled and foamed over the stones in its bed as it rushed headlong down to join the Inn.

“Papa, what will the mines look like?” Stephen asked. “Anything like the cave the Swiss Family found on the island?”

“He means *Swiss Family Robinson*,” Margot said.

Jack grinned. “Wait and see,” was all he would say. “I’ll tell you this much. They are very old mines and no one really knows when the first men began to work them. A good many folk think they were going before ever a Roman Legion marched into Tirol, so that gives you something to be going on—going on for two thousand years.”

“Great Peter!” Con exclaimed. “Not really? All that time? You aren’t pulling our legs, are you?”

“I am not. It was on their account that Hall was raised to the dignity of a town and the burghers of Hall thought so much of them that they chose for their crest one of the flat wooden salt pans in which the rock salt was dried. All the wealth of Hall came from the mines in those days. Salt, as you girls and Roger and Roddy should know, was a precious commodity in those days and there was a heavy tax on it.”

“I know!” Len cried. “At one time, they had a salt-cellar set at each side of the table and you sat above or below the salt according to whether you were one of the family or one of the servants. Remember those *huge* salt-cellar we saw in the museum at Solothurn, you two?” She appealed to her sisters.

"I remember," Margot said. "Young pudding-basins, only they were silver-gilt and most gorgeously chased?"

"And," Con put it, "they *had* to use a lot of salt then, because they had to kill and salt all the meat they were likely to need for the winter."

"Thankful I didn't live in those days!" was Roddy's reaction to this. "Gosh! How sick of salt meat they must have got before the winter ended!"

"Oh, well, Lent came along early in the year and then they didn't eat meat, of course," Len said easily. "Not much, anyhow."

"What did they eat then?" Roddy demanded.

"Oh, fish and vegetables and a sort of porridge they made from dried peas. I tell you, they took their fasting in real earnest in those days."

Ruey laughed. "I always give up sweets and cakes in Lent and that's quite enough for me. I'm like Roddy—I'm jolly glad I didn't live then!"

"What's the big house we're coming to?" Stephen asked.

"That's the Herrenhaus where the mine offices are," his father said. "There's a canteen for miners there as well. Hi, all of you! Notice how close to the mountain wall it stands? At the back, there's a door that leads directly into the mountain and that's where the mines are. It's a salt mountain. Most of them are, round about here. Come on!" as the bus came to a standstill. "Out you get! Put on your blazers, by the way. You'll need 'em before we've gone far."

Thrilled with excitement, they obeyed him and then followed him into the Herrenhaus where they were met by a big, brawny man, wearing an apron over his chamois shorts. He proved to be the house-steward, in charge of the Herrenhaus. When he heard what they wanted, he led them off to a small room, lined with pegs on which hung trousers and jackets of varying size in a heavy khaki material. He looked at each one keenly and then handed them each a set which he bade them put on.

"Bitte sehr, meiner Kinder, wear these. Down yonder it is muddy and cold also—ah! the cold! It is as none other!" He shivered dramatically while everyone meekly got into the things which were, for the most part, enormous. The girls had to find safety-pins and pin up Charles's trousers or he would have tripped on them at every step. Red, cossacklike hats were next handed to them to pull over their hair and they were ready. He led them into the Gastzimmer where one or two miners were sitting smoking and drinking beer. They rose to welcome the visitors and then the steward vanished. His place was taken a minute or two later by a tall young miner with a mop of tow-coloured hair and a pair of brilliant blue eyes.

"First," he said when he had collected them together, "we will look at the model which is old—four hundred years ago, it was made. You will know from that what you are to see. Komm' mit mir!"

They followed him to the old model where he explained it to them. His broad South German was completely Greek to the Three R's and the Maynard boys, but the triplets were able to follow more or less and they kindly explained to the others as he went on. That ended, he took them to the door at the back which opened into the mine. There, he gave each one a tiny acetylene lamp which he lit and then they passed through the door into a timbered tunnel which was so narrow, they had to go in single file, and so low that the roof barely cleared the heads of the guide, the doctor and Roger. The floor was of wet clay, sticky and clammy.

Roger, coming immediately in front of Jack who was at the tail of the file, turned his head to ask with some curiosity. "Why acetylene? Why not electricity?"

"Because if there is any bad gas about, the open light will start flickering and give warning," the doctor explained. "They did try electricity, but found the acetylene was a safer proposition."

"Oh, I see—Lord! What's happening?"

The girls, coming after the guide, were also startled by the rumbling sounds that came to meet them and Margot demanded in her fluent German, "Is it an earthquake on the way?" So it was as well for Ruey's peace of mind that she did not understand her friend's query.

The guide laughed. "Aber, nein! Wait, mein Fräulein and you will see. But I assure you that it is all quite safe—quite safe."

Sure enough, the rumblings increased and presently, they could distinguish the sounds of men's voices talking and when they emerged into a small chamber, there were four or five men, hard at work and talking hard.

"My galloping aunt!" Con ejaculated. "Is *that* all it was? I quite thought we were in for an earthquake at the very least!"

"Well, *I* thought the blinking mountain was coming down on top of us," Roddy owned with a sheepish grin.

"Me, too," Stephen added. "Dad! Why did it sound like that back there?"

"The effect of the deep voices coming to us through a narrow, enclosed space, I expect," Jack replied. "Odd enough to hear suddenly. In fact, I've never heard it before myself. These are the disused parts of the mine, you know. It mightn't be too safe to take visitors through the present-day workings."

They went on through the narrow tunnels, pausing every now and then to look at the exhibits set out in places. They saw drills used for boring holes into the walls for the sticks of dynamite, which, touched off, would bring down the salt in great blocks and boulders; a whole series of the kinds of lights used through the ages, from little resinous sticks and pottery lamps in which a wick floated on a bath of oil, down to electric torches and the small acetylene lamps of the present day; tools such as picks and shovels and models of barrows and wagons used for conveying the salt to the pans where it was dried and purified. At one spot, they came to a case with specimens of salt crystals of every kind—rust-red, that crumbled into powder between one's fingers; a block of white, dazzling and pure in the light; lumps of what looked like yellow marble. Charles made sure that these were really salt by licking one when no one was looking. He dropped it with a grimace. It was salt, all right!

By this time, the timbered walls had gone and they were walking between a dark greyish rock which was salty, too, for Margot wet her finger and rubbed it on one to taste. Then they came out to a low-roofed cavern where all but the three younger boys found it advisable to bend their heads. Here, a pool of what looked like greyish metal glimmered in the flickering light and the guide told them that this was a salt-pit. He waited a moment or two; then he stretched out a hand and electric light blazed down from the roof to show a tiny lake with a equally tiny islet in the middle. There were wee caves scooped out in the rock of the islet and under the light they glowed transparent red, like burning coals.

"Oh, how—how simply *gaudy*!" Ruey breathed as she gazed.

Len turned to the guide. "My friend says this is lovely," she informed him in her prettily accented German.

"It's like being in a fairy tale—or *Gulliver's Travels*!" Con added.

The man beamed. "But I have to show you what is even lovelier," he said. "Come with me over here."

He led them to the head of a wooden runway which seemed to drop literally into an abyss of darkness and waved his lamp as he said, “Down there, it is wunderschön! Come! We will go!”

He sat down on the rounded rail that ran down the centre of the slide and told Len to sit behind him and put her hands on his shoulders. At this point, the doctor came forward.

“One moment!” he said. “You can’t take all this crowd down with you. Ruey, sit behind Len—now Con—Margot last. You get off,” he turned again to the guide. “I’ll follow with the boys. Ruey, don’t be scared. It’s perfectly safe. All you have to do is to hold on to Len’s shoulders. It’s no worse than going down a switch-back. O.K.” as Margot settled into her place. He changed to German. “They are ready, but go slowly, at first.”

Much to Ruey’s relief, they did go slowly, but a moment later, Margot was crying, “Oh, can’t we go faster?” She appealed to the guide. “Bitte, mein Herr, schneller!”

“Jawohl!” he said imperturbably; and faster they did go—and faster—and faster, until they were whizzing down the slide at lightning speed, to land safely at the foot where the man helped them all to their feet before calling up, “We are here, mein Herr! Come, now!”

The next moment, they heard wild whoops and yells as Jack and his train of boys shot down to join them, Stephen and Charles shrieking their heads off with excitement and Roddy not far behind them.

When they had finally got to their feet, the guide switched on more lights, this time all round the circle of the pit and they saw a much larger lake with a real island. Someone had arranged little models of trolls and gnomes among the caves and on the far wall of the cavern, which was even lower than the last, the lights spelled out the German for “Good luck.”

It was some minutes before anyone would agree to move on. At last Jack insisted and they left the fairylike scene to go down yet another tunnel at the end of which was a single steel line on which stood a long trolley, rather like a backless school form. The guide sat down astride it and gestured to the others to copy him. It was a good deal of a squash, but they managed it and once more went hurtling downwards. Colder and colder it grew as they went lower and lower. Not even their own warm blazers and the heavy miners’ khaki could keep out that cold. Then Ruey, half-thrilled, half-terrified, saw straight ahead a pin-point of light which grew larger and larger and before she could make up her mind what was coming next, the scent of newly mown hay under a hot sun reached her and with a rattle, the trolley came to a halt just inside the sunlit door of a cave and they were staring out into a meadow where the second hay-crop was ready for carrying and bees buzzed sleepily as they sought the nectar in the thousands of wild flowers growing all round.

“Oh!” gasped Con behind her. “What a *miraculous* ending!”

“What a contrast!” said Roger with a thought for the bitter cold and darkness through which they had just come.

The guide smiled as they all scrambled off the trolley and out into the meadow where Stephen and Charles, clutching each other, rolled like a couple of puppies till called sternly to order by their father.

“Hi, you two! This is hay, ready for carrying! Get up and don’t mess it about! And get out of those hot togs. We’ve still got to climb back to the Herrenhaus, remember.” He turned and spoke a few words of thanks to the guide which the triplets supplemented with their own thanks. The man beamed more broadly than ever and thanked them for coming with him.

“The gracious ladies will remember our salt mines, nicht wahr?” he said.

The “gracious ladies” on the verge of giggles at being addressed like this, agreed that they would. They all doffed the heavy miners’ overalls and the queer caps and then set off on the long and toilsome trail up to the Herrenhaus, for the tunnels had all led downwards and what with them and the two chutes, they had dropped a considerable distance.

Jack slipped a Trinkgeld into the man’s hand before he led the way across the sun-drenched meadow, and up by a twisting path to the Herrenhaus, there to deposit their overalls before he took them into the Gastzimmer where he ordered coffee and rolls and honey for the entire party.

“It’s been simply marvellous!” Ruey said as they were rattled back to Hall in the bus. “I’ll *never* forget those two lakes and the ducky islands. Thanks a million for bringing us, Uncle Jack.”

He laughed and gave a tug at a wild lock of hair. “Glad you enjoyed it. I knew it would be something quite fresh to all of you. Now we’ll go and seek a meal of sorts and then take a dekkko at Hall, though I’m afraid you’ll think that very flat after all this excitement. It’s early bed tonight for every last one of you, by the way. Tomorrow, we’re taking you to the Zillerthal and that means a very early start. We’ll have a meal at Mayrhofen and then take the bus right up the valley to Hintertux.”

“What’s there to see there?” Len demanded.

“Ah-ha! That’s a secret until we get there. But I’ll tell you one thing. Your mother is coming with us. She promised she would as she’s never been that far up the Zillerthal and she wants to see it.”

“Oh, good!” It was Roger who got there first. “It seemed a rotten shame for her to stay behind while we went off to enjoy ourselves.”

His adopted uncle glanced at him. “Oh, that often happens when you have a long family of small fry. *Someone* has to abide by the stuff, you know. However, Anna is a host in herself and Rösli is another. We can trust the babies to them with easy minds. And, of course, once the rest of the nursery arrives, to say nothing of young Mike, it’ll need some watching to keep an eye on the lot.”

“Don’t worry about Mike, Dad,” Stephen said sturdily. “He’ll be O.K.”

“I hope so, I’m sure. Ah! Here we are at the bus-station! Lead the way, Len.”

The first thing was to seek a hotel for a meal and he treated them all to what he described as “a purely Tirolean meal.” They began with consommé in which swam a poached egg and followed it with Pariser Schnitzel which turned out to be a steak of veal fried to a luscious tenderness and accompanied by spinach cooked with butter salt, a hint of garlic, so faint that Roddy demanded to know what “this smashing flavour” was, and a little cream, and potato balls cooked in a deep butter sauce. They wound up with apfeltorte which proved to be a hot spongy mixture topped with pulped apple and whipped cream. A light wine accompanied all this, for Jack knew enough not to let them have unadulterated water in a mountain district; and cups of golden coffee, on which floated more whipped cream, put the crown on a feast that made even the ever-hungry Stephen draw a deep sigh and remark, “I should *bust* if I ate another crumb!”

After that, they explored the town and when they had had coffee and wonderful cakes in a restaurant, it was time to seek the train.

And now, for the first time since they had left the Tiernsee, Roger began to wonder about his father’s letter. But he was doomed to disappointment. Joey was waiting at the door for them with a gleeful report that everything was done and Daisy and her belongings could come

as soon as they liked. But when she had said that and thanked them for the various souvenirs each had brought her from Hall, she turned to Roger to say, "I'm sorry, Roger, but your Dad ought to go back to school and take lessons in writing! I've made out a few words here and there, but nothing to make much sense. Beyond the fact that he foresees that he'll be very busy in the near future, but will be all right, I can't tell you a thing."

"Oh, well," he said after a moment, "it's only what I expected. It's better than nothing anyhow. By the way, Auntie Jo, did you manage to make out where he is?"

Ruey turned quickly as Joey said, "Beyond the fact that it's somewhere in the Himalayas, no. And that's a fairly big area, so I'm afraid it's not much use writing there. We must just wait until his next letter arrives. And now, everyone," she added in a different tone. "Supper's ready and waiting—all cold!—so come along and you can tell me all your adventures while we have it."

Chapter XVII

CHARLES!

It was between two and three in the morning. The elder Maynards had retired to bed three hours earlier and were both sound asleep. Joey had made the rounds at eleven as was her usual custom and had found everyone fast asleep. So far as she knew, all was well. She had given the babies their last bottles and retired thankfully to get at least six hours' oblivion with any luck. The moon was waning and her light fell across the room where Len and Ruey were buried fathoms deep in slumber. In fact, Ruey had retired right under the bedclothes and nothing was to be seen of her but the top of her head.

Len, spread-eagled across her own bed and dreaming happily of a tennis match in which she was bringing off the most fabulous strokes, was roused by someone bunting her. She opened her heavy eyes and half-sat up. The next moment, she was wide awake, for the "bunter" was Charles. Even in the dim light he looked odd to her and tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Chas! What ever is wrong with you?" she demanded, careful to keep her voice to an undertone. "Don't yell, my love, and wake Ruey. Here! Get in beside me! You must be starved with cold, coming here in your pyjamas and bare feet! Come along and I'll warm you. What's wrong, poor old man?"

She put out her hand and took her brother's to pull him into bed beside her. The next moment, she was out on the floor, fishing for her slippers and dressing-gown. She wriggled into them, picked up the boy and carried him back to his own room next door. Charles seemed in too much trouble to talk. The tears streamed down his face and he was shaking with sobs. Len switched on the light and tucked him up in his own bed. She sat on the edge, one arm round him, and tried to find out what was wrong.

"Is it a pain?" she asked. "Do you feel sick? Tell me, Chas. Where is it? Show me, and I'll see if I can help at all."

She felt alarmed as she sat with the boy in her arms. He was very flushed and hot and behind the tears, his eyes were glassily brilliant. She had enough experience to know that he was running a temperature. At the same time, if she could cope herself, she meant to. The first thing was to find out what ailed him.

"Tell me, honey," she coaxed. "Where is the pain? It's a bad one, I know."

Charles fought down his sobs and managed to gasp. "It's in my tummy. Oh, Len! It's a—a *dreadful* pain!"

"O.K. I'll get you a hot water bottle first," she said, laying him down on his pillow and standing up. "Just a tick until I go and get the electric kettle and a bottle. There's a point in this room, mercifully, so I can hot it here. I shan't be a minute."

Charles nodded, rubbing his eyes with his fists. Len looked at him with compressed lips. Then she went off downstairs to find the kettle and a rubber bottle. Luckily, Anna had filled her big kettle before she went to bed and left it on the stove and the water was fairly hot. Len filled the electric kettle from it, found a rubber bottle and then, as an afterthought, picked up a big jug of milk, a beaker and the little electric plunge-heater. As a final effort, she rooted in a drawer and brought out an adaptor with an air of triumph. Now she could heat a drink for Charles while the water "hotted up" for the bottle. She piled everything on a tray and went

back upstairs quickly and quietly. There was little danger of disturbing their parents, once she was in Charles's room. Both that, her own and a bathroom were down a short passage leading off at right angles to the main corridor where her mother's big bedroom and the night nursery were.

"I do *not* want to dig them out," she thought, referring to her parents. "Mamma must be about dead after the hectic day she's had and Papa must be pretty done, too. It may just be that gorgeous meal we had in Hall. Anyhow, I'll see what I can do first."

She found her small brother lying quietly enough. When she asked him, he said that the pain wasn't so bad now. She plugged in the kettle and left it to heat while she dealt with the milk-heater.

"I'm turning off the light for a minute or two," she said in low tones. "I think a drink of hot milk might help you and I've brought an adaptor to take it. But the bulb'll be too hot for me to touch for a second. There's plenty of moonlight to see what I'm doing."

She switched off the light, went to the bathroom for the Disprin and a towel, then climbed on a chair and removed the lamp with the aid of the towel and fitted up her contraption quite handily. Charles made no remark and when she looked at him again, she saw that his eyes were closed and he seemed to be drowsing.

"I'll see what this lot does for him," she thought as she plunged the heater into the milk. "Gosh! He does look hot! Wish I'd brought the thermometer!"

However, she felt she ought to stay with him for the present, at least, so she let it go. Ten minutes later, she slipped a hot bottle in beside him and then with an arm round him, held the milk to his lips.

"Try a sip or two of this, Chas," she said. "Is the bottle comfy?"

He nodded. Then he sipped obediently, presently taking the beaker himself. "I c'n manage. Besides you're spilling it down me. Oh, I'm thirsty!"

"Well, sip it; don't gulp it or it may make you worse," she warned him.

He grinned wanly at her, and again she felt alarm. However, she said nothing. He drank about half the milk and then pushed it aside. She took it from him, laid him down and tucked him up again.

"Feeling a little better now?" she asked.

"Uh-huh! Don't you go, Len! Stay with me—please!"

"O.K. I'm staying—'til you fall asleep, anyhow. I'll just have a drop of milk myself. I'm feeling cold. It's hot enough in the daytime, but it's jolly chilly at night," Len said as she found his tooth-glass and poured out some milk for herself. Then she switched off the light and came to sit in the moonlight beside him. He had snuggled down, cuddling his bottle to him and his long lashes were down. Len put out a cautious hand and touched him. She definitely did *not* like his heat, but she had given him a Disprin before the milk and she hoped it would lower his temperature. She finished her own milk and set the glass under the chair. Then she pulled her dressing-gown closely round her and prepared to stay there for a while.

"But if he goes on being hot, I'll have to fetch Papa," she thought. "I'd rather not wake him, for it might disturb Mamma and after what happened at the beginning of those hols, I'd rather not do that unless I have to. It may just be biliousness after that luscious feast, though that isn't like Chas. I've heard Papa say he and Steve could digest scupper nails! But if it is only that, I can cope myself quite well."

Charles slept restlessly. Little moans came from him now and then and when Len touched him again, he was still terribly hot. About half-past three, he roused up, complaining of

feeling sick. The pain returned and despite all his bravery, the tears came with it. Len felt that it was time to take more drastic measures.

"I'll fetch Papa," she said at last, standing up. "He'll give you something to cure it. I won't be a minute, I promise."

"Do—don't wake MM—Mamma," he sobbed. "P—Papa said we w—were to t—take care of he—her. Only the pain's—so—o b—bad!"

"I'll be careful," she promised. "Lie as still as you can and hold that bottle to you. I'll be back in two twinkles of a puppy-dog's tail!"

He nodded and wriggled down the bed under the clothes, burying his face in the pillow. Len hesitated no more. She slipped out of the room and along to her parents' where all was peace. Jack and Joey were both sound asleep and so were the babies in the night nursery. Luckily for her, her father slept at the side nearest the door into the passage. She tiptoed up to the bed and tapped him lightly behind his ear.

"Papa—Papa!" she said in the lowest of undertones. "Come to Chas, will you? He's awfully queer and I don't like his heat. Do come!"

Jack was awake in an instant. "I'll come. Go back to him and wait. Don't wake Mamma, whatever you do."

Len nodded and left the room to go back to her small brother who was sobbing exhaustedly into his pillow. She sat down beside him and took him into her arms again.

"It's all right, Chas! Papa is coming and he'll soon help you. Try not to cry or it may make the pain worse. There, poor old man! It'll be better soon."

"Move aside and let me see, Len," said their father's voice behind her. He took her place and his fingers went instantly to the boy's wrist. "There, there, poor old Chas! Show me where the pain is."

Charles pointed and the long, sensitive fingers touched the area carefully. Then he nodded, laid Charles down and covered him up. "I see. Well, we'll soon have you easy, so try not to cry. Len, what have you done for him?"

"Hot bottle—hot milk—but he didn't take much of it—and a Disprin," Len said succinctly.

"I see. Good girl, Len! But I'm afraid it means something more drastic than all that. It was the right treatment though. Now run along and wake Mamma and tell her what's wrong. When you come back, refill that kettle and set it to heat again. This bottle's cooling. That's all. I'll stay till you come back."

Len longed to ask what was wrong, but she let it go for the moment and ran along to the big bedroom where she speedily woke her mother.

"Mamma! Chas is rotten. Papa says will you come to him."

Joey was awake in an instant. Like most mothers of small children, she usually slept with one ear open. Almost before Len had finished speaking, she was out of bed and shuffling her feet into her slippers. Her dressing-gown lay close at hand, and as the girl left the room to hurry back to her brother's, Joey was after her, wriggling into her gown as she went. She met Len as that young woman came out with the kettle.

"Papa says his bottle needs hotting up," Len explained.

Joey merely nodded and pushed past her. It was true that it was a rare thing for Charles to be either sick or sorry, but he had been a very frail baby for the first year or so of his life and she was wildly anxious now. She was at his bedside in two steps and kneeling down to take him in her arms and cuddle him to her.

"Mamma!" he sobbed. "I d—did try n—not to wake you—"

"I know, darling! You've been very brave, but Mamma is here now and she will stay with you until you feel better. Papa will soon put a stop to the horrid pain, I'm sure!" But her eyes looking up anxiously across the boy into Jack's face asked what was wrong with almost panic.

"Acute appendix, I'm afraid," he said in a tone so low that Charles, his face buried in his mother's neck, was unable to hear. "Stay with him, will you? I'm ringing up the San to send an ambulance. This must be seen to at once."

She nodded. "Can do! Here comes Len with the kettle! Now we'll soon have a nice hot bottle to help you, my precious. Plug it in, Len, and go and get the kitchen stove going, will you? You'd better call Anna as well. We may need her."

"O.K.!" And Len was off again, thankful for something to do.

She called Anna first and then scurried off to the kitchen to open the dampers of the stove and rake it through. That done, she ran back along the hall to the stairs and her father came out of the study where he had been telephoning.

"Papa! What's wrong with Chas?" she asked fearfully.

"Appendicitis, I'm afraid. Go and dress, child, but don't wake anyone else if you can help it. Take your clothes to the bathroom. Since you *are* up and awake, you may as well make yourself useful. When you're ready, go and put on the coffee. Mamma will want to go to the San with him and she ought to have a hot drink at least before she goes out into this cold."

"I'll put it on now, since I'm downstairs," Len replied. "It won't take me a second to dress." And she darted back to the kitchen to put the percolator on the hot-plate before she ran lightly upstairs to her own room, where she rescued her clothes and a comb and ribbon and went to the bathroom to dress at express speed and plait up her long hair which was flying all round her by this time.

She peeped into Charles' room when she was ready and found that Anna, looking fearsome in her thick flannel nightdress with a huge scarlet shawl wrapped round her and her hair in curling-rags all over her head, was sitting at the bedside. Jack and Joey had both disappeared and Charles seemed to be lying quietly.

"How is he now, Anna?" she asked in German as she tiptoed in.

Anna smiled up at her through her enormous glasses. "The good papa has given him something to ease the pain and make him sleep, so that is well. Go, mein Liebling, and make sandwiches and coffee for the dear mamma before she goes out. I stay here."

"I'm going!" Len left the room and ran downstairs where she hurried to prepare a light meal. When she had everything in train, she switched on the electric fire in the Speisesaal and went back upstairs to her mother's room. Her father was leaving it, fully dressed, and he nodded at her and told her to go and help her mother.

Joey was nearly dressed. She was just pulling a woollen jumper over her head as Len entered. She smiled at the girl as she took up her comb and began to comb out her hair before plaiting and coiling it into the great flat shells over her ears which was her favoured style.

"Good girl, Len! What a blessing and a comfort you always are to me!"

Len reddened. "I couldn't do anything else. Chas came and woke me—I was nearest, of course—so I did what I could, but guessed it was something pretty bad, he was so terribly hot and he was crying with the pain and you know that's not like Charles." She paused. Then she added, "Mamma, will it mean an operation?"

"I'm afraid so. Your father says it's an acute appendix and in that case, the sooner it's yanked out, the better. We're going up with him to the San, but I expect I'll be down again

before the evening. It all depends—” She stopped and gazed at nothing.

Len put an arm round her shoulders. “Papa says it’s quite a simple operation.”

“Oh, I know! And he’ll have the best of care. Oh, I suppose I’m silly to worry like this, but it’s a shock. It’s come so suddenly, you see. Len, he hasn’t said anything about not feeling well or having a pain during the last few days, has he?”

“Not to me and I don’t think he’s said anything to any of the others. He seemed absolutely fit all day and ate a huge meal. That was why I didn’t come for you at first. I thought he might be bilious.”

“Yes; I see.” Then she went off at a tangent. “Goodness, Len! This means a complete stopper on the Zillerthal trip. What will you do?”

“Oh, as if any of us would care two hoots when Chas is ill!” Len exclaimed, bringing her mother’s cap and coat and a big scarf. “You’d better have a cardigan, too, hadn’t you? It’s frantically cold, considering what a hot day it was.”

“By this time, my lamb, you ought to know that that’s what you expect in the mountains. Yes; I’ll have the cardigan belonging to this set.”

“And don’t you worry about us,” Len went on as she found the cardigan. “You and Papa can just hop off with Chas and we’ll manage all right. None of us are kids and it isn’t as if we had the twins and Cecil and Mike to think of. Now come downstairs. I’ve switched on the fire in the Speisesaal and got coffee and sandwiches all ready, so that you can feel warm inside as well as out. Papa told me to.”

Joey stretched out a long arm and pulled her girl to her. “Bless you!” she said, smiling into the violet eyes that were so nearly on a level with her own nowadays. “We’ll go along and take a peep at Chas, poor pet, and then go down. Papa has given him something to deaden the pain and I expect he’ll be pretty drowsy by this time. Anna will stay with him and we’ll go down and have this coffee we’ve heard so much about. Come along!”

They were at the door of the room by this time. Charles was drowsing as Joey had said, but Len could see that he still looked very ill with that brilliant flush in his cheeks. She said nothing, but she felt very frightened. He looked so tiny and so frail. Jack was sitting with him. He looked up as the two entered.

“Any news of the ambulance yet?” he asked.

“Not so far as I know.” Joey went to bend over her small boy. “It’s still rather soon, isn’t it? Poor lamb! But at least you’ve eased that horrible pain!”

“Yes; and he’s no worse. The pulse is fairly steady, all things considered. Don’t worry more than you must, Joey. He looks fragile, I know, but he has a tough little constitution. He’ll come through all right, please God!” He stood up. “You can take my place, Anna, and we’ll go and get a hot drink before we have to go out. Want to kiss him, Len? He won’t rouse, poor little chap.”

Len stooped and kissed him. Anna came by her to take her place by the bed.

“Go down with the parents, mein Liebling,” she said in a whisper to Len. “See that both eat and drink. And have no fear. We must trust to the good God.”

Len nodded silently and followed her parents from the room. She poured out the coffee and coaxed them both to eat though Joey, at any rate, felt like choking on each mouthful. They had just finished when they heard the hoot of a motor-horn and Jack went to the door. A big car stood there and out of it sprang one of the doctors from the Sonnalpe Sanatorium. Jack had met him before and so had Joey. They had a few words together. Then the two doctors went

upstairs to bring the patient down after Doktor von Kramm explained that he had brought the car as it was for a small child and, in any case, faster and easier than the big ambulance.

Joey pulled on her cap and coat and Len wrapped the scarf round her before giving her her gloves and bag. "I think that's everything. And promise! No worrying about us! We'll be all right. No one will want to do anything mad while poor old Chas is so ill. You'll ring up and let us have news as soon as there is any, won't you? We'll be anxious, you know."

"One of us will. I promise you that.—Ah! They're bringing him down now!" She paused a moment. Then she set her hands on the girl's slim shoulders. "Len, you have never been anything but a joy and a blessing to your father and me from the day you were born. Thank you for everything tonight. You've made it all much easier for both of us and I can leave the rest to you and Anna quite happily. Bless you!" She bent her head and kissed her girl warmly.

Len was scarlet. "Oh, Mamma! I've done nothing, really, honestly! After all, I *am* the eldest. It's my job to help out if I can."

"And you do it well! Good-bye, my long-legs! I'll see you this evening, I expect. Mind you go straight to bed as soon as we've gone. Anna will lock up."

Then Jack came through the hall, carrying Charles carefully, Doktor von Kramm after him, and when they had gone out, Joey followed them. Len came to the door, but Jack sent her in again.

"Don't stay out in the cold! Now get off to bed as soon as you can, and I've told Anna to let you have your sleep out in the morning."

"Yes; but she can wake me when the news comes, can't she?"

"Certainly. But don't worry. Chas will come through all right. We've taken it in time, thank goodness! They'll have everything ready for us when we get there and that appendix will be yanked out in short order. After that, it's just a case of building him up again and I will say for you folk you all recover from any illness with amazing rapidity. Now trot along. We can't wait!" He kissed her, pushed her in and slammed the door shut. The next sound was the departure of the car and then Anna, who had been standing by the stairs, came to her eldest nursling.

"Come to bed, mein Blümchen. Believe me, all will be well. Thou art weary now. It will be better in the morning when thou hast slept."

Len turned to her. "Oh, Anna! It's all been so dreadful and I'm *so* tired!"

"I know it. Come to bed!"

Len was far too tired to argue. She went upstairs with Anna who fairly undressed her and put her to bed as if she had been four instead of barely two months short of her fifteenth birthday.

"You won't forget to wake me when any news comes?" she asked sleepily before Anna left the room where Ruey had slept through everything.

"No; I will not forget. Now gute Nacht, mein Liebling. God bless thee!"

But when the news did come that the operation was well over and Charles had come through it in good shape, Len was far too deeply asleep to be roused and Anna left her. Indeed, it was not until noon that she finally woke up to find Con standing by her bed with a laden tray in her hands and Margot wheeling the bed-table into the room. She stared up at them speechlessly.

"Awake at last!" Margot said, swinging the hinged leaf across her triplet's knees. "Sit up and have your—well, I don't know *what* you can call it. But sit up and have it, anyhow. And oh, Len," as Len sat up and Con set the tray on the table. "Mamma rang up an hour ago and

it's the best news possible. Chas has come through and he's sleeping and getting stronger every hour. She'll be down herself this afternoon because there's nothing she can do for him and everyone is pleased with him. Now get through that and while you do, you can just tell us what happened during the night and *why* you hogged everything to yourself instead of calling US!"

Chapter XVIII

DAISY TELLS A STORY

Monday brought the Rosomon family and Joey's missing four to the Tiernsee. The Maynard family rejoiced long and loud over the young fry, but it was nothing compared with Daisy Rosomon's loudly-voiced delight at finding herself once more in the place where she had been so happy as a small girl.

The news from the Sonnalpe had to be told and Laurence Rosomon went up with Jack to visit the patient who was steadily sleeping himself well again. They returned to the lakeside with permission for the gentleman's family to visit him after the next day, when it was expected that he would have reached a more or less convalescent stage.

"It was urgent enough," Jack told Joey, Daisy and the six eldest of the family, "but perfectly straightforward. Nurse says she expect he'll be very cross tomorrow and then we can really look ahead. He's going to be exceedingly cross when he gets it into his head that he can't go back to school with Steve but must wait till half-term! This is his year for Common Entry and he told me weeks ago that he meant to swot and get a really good place."

"It won't hurt him to miss half-a-term," Joey said cheerfully. "He has brains all right and he's always been a steady worker. O.K. We'll arrange who's to go first when tomorrow comes. Daisy, if you want to be really helpful, you might take Mike and Steve and Roddy for a stroll while I get the twins and Cecil to bed. Can't spare the girls. I need them."

"With all that lot? I'll say you do!" Daisy returned gaily. "Come on chaps! We'll take a stroll round the Seespitz end and back. My pair won't wake up, thank goodness! I remembered you and your training, Joey, and I'm seeing to it that the boys keep early hours."

"Peter's not likely to be a bother that way for long enough yet," Joey laughed. "Twins! Cecil! Come along! Bedtime!"

The next day was spent in accompanying Daisy and her husband round the lake so that she might renew her acquaintance with all the old haunts and introduce him to them. Everyone went—including the babies in their prams. Cecil and Tony were put into one double go-cart, which the girls took turns to push. The elder twins, so nearly six years old that Felicity was beginning to say, "I'm six!" when anyone asked her age, were quite capable of walking a good distance and the men said they would carry them if it got too much for their short legs.

Ruey had been enchanted by the utter unlikeness of the twins and Cecil. They were milk-fair, with flaxen curls, big blue eyes and pink and white faces. She was very dark—the darkest of all Joey's children, with her black mop, big black eyes so like her mother's, and warm olive colouring.

That evening, when the four girls were sitting on a felled tree not far from Die Blumen, while the mothers saw the small fry to bed and the boys went off with Laurie Rosomon for a tramp down to Tiernkirche at the far end of the lake, Ruey voiced her ideas on the subject.

"It's so *odd*!" she observed, stretching her tanned legs before her and examined her sandals critically. "There's no *monotony* about your crowd, anyhow."

Margot chuckled. "You're dead right—there isn't! I don't believe," she added thoughtfully, "that there ever was. And it's more than looks, too. Mamma says she could never be bored with such a—a conglomeration on her hands."

"I like Mrs. Rosomon," Ruey continued thoughtfully. "What relation, exactly, is she to you people?"

"None at all," Len returned promptly. "Her mother was our Uncle Jem's sister—Auntie Madge's husband, you know. She's *his* niece. Years ago, when she was a kid at school, she used to call Mamma 'Auntie.' They said they were aunt and niece by marriage. But she isn't any real relation."

"No; but she feels like it," Con supplemented. "After all, her home was at our house for years and years, almost since her mother died. Margot is called after her as well as after Auntie Madge. *Her* name was Margot, too."

"That was why," said Margot herself. "You see, we three were born less than a year after Daisy's mother died and our mother thought it would please her—Daisy, I mean. Primula, too, of course."^[11]

^[11] The Chalet School in Exile.

"Who is Primula?" Ruey asked curiously.

"Daisy's sister—years younger. She's only twenty. Daisy's twenty-eight. I wish she'd come with them. You'd like her, Ruey. She's sweet! Awfully tiny and fairer even than Daisy. We three can look over her head quite easily." This was Con.

"Why *didn't* she come with them?"

"Because she's staying with Auntie Madge and her crowd."

"*Who* is staying with Auntie Madge?" asked a fresh voice behind them. They turned round and there was Daisy herself, very pretty in her green woolly suit with lacy woollen jumper in palest primrose. She calmly parted Margot and Ruey who were sitting together, with the remark, "Make room for a little 'un, please."

They moved over and she sat down. "What are you four talking about? And how, by the way, do you like my Number Two?"

"He should have been a girl," Len said severely. "You have Tony already."

Daisy laughed. "I rather hoped he would be—but he wasn't! Oh, well, better luck next time, perhaps! I'll promise you three one thing if she arrives."

"What?" They made a chorus of it.

"I'll call her after the three of you—Margaret Helena Constance."

"The lot of it?" Len asked with a giggle. "She *will* bless you when she's grown-up and has to sign entrance forms and cheques and things like that!"

"What will you call her for short?" Margot queried. "We've used up nearly all the shorts for 'Margaret' already."

"I hadn't got that far along in my thinking. 'Maggie,' perhaps!"

"Not you!" Con said placidly. "The family would all sit heavily on anything like that. I think it's a *hideous* short!"

"Yes; but as Margot just said, we've used up almost all the other shorts," Daisy said plaintively. "Auntie Madge is 'Madge.' You," she pointed to Margot, "are 'Margot.' I'm 'Daisy.' Peggy Bettany is 'Peggy'—when she isn't 'Peg.' We both loathe 'Greta' and 'Rita,' so what else is there left, seeing neither of us cares for the full name?"

"Call her 'Meg' like Corney Flower's done—van Brandt, I mean," Len suggested. "Her second little girl is Margaret Josephine and Corney said she was to be 'Meg' for short. And it would go quite well with 'Tony' and 'Peter'!"

"H'm! That's an idea! I must think it over. However, there's plenty of time yet. Peter is only two months old, please remember. I'd like to have him on his feet before a sister comes along for them." She was silent a moment or two. Then she turned to Len. "How you've grown, Len! In fact, how all three of you have grown! A leggie lot of girls I never hope to see. I'm sorry for your mother having to cope with frocks for you three!"

"As a matter of fact," said Len with a tilt of her chin, "I've grown scarcely at all these hols. Father says he thinks we've probably got most of our growing over now."

"Quite likely. I did most of *my* growing, too at your age. I say!" she changed the subject. "I've got a story for you people. It's Ruey's story, really, but I'm sure she won't mind sharing with you." She projected a smile at Ruey who blushed.

"Ruey's story?" Margot cried. "How do you mean?"

"You'll see presently. Ruey, do you happen to know what your mother's surname was before she married?"

"Thompson," said Ruey briefly, though she opened her eyes at this.

"*What*—Thomson?"

"I don't understand—Oh! You mean her Christian name? She was Evelyn—Evelyn Thompson. I'm called after her, but I never use it, thank goodness! I think Evelyn is a sissy sort of name!" Ruey cocked her head on one side and eyed Daisy with interest. "Why d'you want to know?"

"I'll explain in a moment. It's part of the story. You just answer my questions first," Daisy ordered.

Ruey subsided and all four girls waited eagerly for the next query.

"Do you know where she used to live when she was a girl?"

Ruey shook her head. "Mummy never talked much about these days and she always squashed us if we asked any questions. Just before she died, though, when I was sitting beside her one afternoon, she said, 'When I'm better, Ruey, I have a good deal I want to say to you. I can't think now: my head feels so queer.' And then the nurse came and said I must go and when I was with her next, it was to say good-bye. She seemed to be going on all right and then, in the middle of the night, she suddenly collapsed. They called us, but she was—was—well, anyhow, all she could say was that I was to look after the boys for her and I promised."

"And you've made a jolly decent job of it," Len put in, seeing that Ruey seemed rather overcome by all this.

"But why do you want to know?" Con demanded. "What's your reason?"

Daisy looked at them thoughtfully and they all stared solemnly back at her.

"Yes, Con; you're right. I *have* a reason and I'm going to tell you now. I may say that I expect Laurie is telling the boys this very moment." She stopped a moment and the four sat on tenterhooks, waiting for her to continue, for this was most mysterious. What could Ruey's mother possibly have to do with Daisy?

That lady suddenly smiled at them and went on. "The fact is that we—he—well to put it into a nutshell, you three are Laurie's second cousins!" Having got it out, she sat back and waited for comments.

None came for a moment or two for she had given them all a shock. Then Ruey said slowly, "We three are Dr. Rosomon's second cousins? But—but *how*?"

Now that she had broken the ice, Daisy was able to go on. "I'll explain. Laurie's mother was a Miss Thompson before her marriage. She was the sixth in a family of seven and she and the brother who came after her were distinct after-thoughts. The sister before her was nearly

nine when she was born. She was still at school when her eldest brother married and she hadn't left when they had a little girl who was christened 'Evelyn.' There were two more later, both boys, but they don't come into this yarn. One was killed at Dunkirk and the other was shot down flying over Germany two years later. Captain Thompson—he was captain in the Union Castle line—died when Bertie, the youngest, was only a baby and his widow was left to bring up the children on her own.

"Unfortunately, according to Grannie Rosomon, Mrs. Thompson was a very bossy sort of person and she wanted to keep the children to herself. She came from Liverpool and she went back there to live. She brought up her family more or less to think her thoughts and like what she liked and all the rest of it. You couldn't do it nowadays and you couldn't do it altogether then. In any case, it's not right. We all have to grow up with our *own* characters and not take them second-hand from other people. Mrs. Thompson wanted her children to have no life apart from hers."

"But how—how sort of imprisoning!" Con explained.

"I know. And it didn't work out in the end. Evelyn met a young man who was at Liverpool University, and they fell in love. He was very clever and in his last year. He had a job to go to and could quite well afford to keep a wife, especially as Evelyn had some money of her own from her father—or would have when she was twenty-one. But Mrs. Thompson took a deep dislike to him and she wouldn't hear of even an engagement. She said she was alone, or would be when the boys went out to work and it was Evelyn's duty to stay with her widowed mother and keep her company."

"But that was a disgustingly selfish thing to do!" Ruey exclaimed.

"Didn't she want her ever to get married?" Con asked, wide-eyed. "But supposing she had died—the mother, I mean—and Evelyn hadn't been married, *she* would have been left alone then. Didn't her mother think of that?"

"Doesn't look like it. At any rate, she didn't want her to marry this man. She put her foot down on the whole thing; forbade Evelyn ever to meet him again or write to him or have anything to do with him. There *are* those people," Daisy went on largely. "They don't see how selfish they are and, of course, it doesn't happen nearly so often nowadays. But you've got to remember that Mrs. Thompson had been born and brought up mainly in the nineteenth century when it was much more common.

"Evelyn Thompson had been brought up to obey her mother as I told you, and at first, she just gave in. But this Mr. Richardson—he wasn't a professor then, that came later—wasn't having any. He managed to meet her outside the bank where she worked as secretary to the manager, and the end of it all was that one evening, Evelyn never came home. That did happen sometimes if they were extra busy at the bank and her mother thought she had gone to spend the night with another of the girls who worked there as she had done before. *But,*" Daisy-held up a finger, "next morning she got a letter from London in which Evelyn said she couldn't give up George and she'd been most desperately unhappy until they met again and now they'd come up to London and would be married by special licence that day."

"*Gosh!*" said Margot deeply. "What a shock for her mother!"

"It was, of course. I think it may have helped to make her as hard as she was on her daughter. She was furious, of course, and she didn't take time to think. She just wrote back to the address Evelyn had given her and said she never wanted to see her again. All her belongings would be packed up and sent to her and the lawyer would be writing to her about the money her father had left her. She was not to attempt to keep in touch with the boys. By

going off like that, she had cut herself off from her family and she had only herself to blame. It was no use her writing, for any such letter would be instantly returned, unopened."

"But you can't *do* that sort of thing to your own child!" Len cried.

"Oh, yes, you can, if you have that sort of mind. Laurie says his Aunt Margaret had. That," Daisy put in in parenthesis, "is one reason why, if our daughter comes along next time, we don't want to use the full name. See what you can do, even to a name! Anyhow, that what she wrote and she stuck to it. All your mother's belongings, Ruey, were packed up and sent off to her—even some furniture that belonged to her from an aunt's estate. The lawyer wrote, too, about the money business and warned both the Richardsons that it was no use trying to soften Mrs. Thompson just then. She was raging mad about it and wouldn't hear reason from anyone."

"Oh, poor Mummy!" Ruey burst out. "I don't care if the old thing *was* my own grandmother! I think she was a mean, selfish, despicable old *hunks*!"

Daisy glanced at her. "I know. But Evelyn wasn't altogether blameless. In one way she was almost as selfish to go off as she did. However, Laurie says that from all he's heard, it was the only way she could do it. She couldn't stand up to her mother after the way she'd been brought up. Grannie Rosomon told him that if Evelyn had only written to her father's family, they would have tried to ease things a little, but she had a temper of her own and she said very well! If that was the way things were, she wasn't going to worry about any of them—and she didn't! She simply died on them to all intents and purposes, and no one knew where she was. They did know that she had children. They saw the notices in *The Times*. But as no address was ever given, it wasn't much help."

"But," said Margot, "there are dozens of Richardsons in the world—*thousands*! How did Laurie get on to it that Ruey and the boys must be his cousin Evelyn's?"

"Their father's names! Evelyn must have said something to one of them some time or other and Grannie told him about it when we were discussing a name for Tony. When Joey wrote to me two or three weeks ago, she mentioned that the Professor was George Theophilus Archibald Baynard Richardson and the moment Laurie saw it he shouted, 'But that's the name of the chap my cousin Evelyn Thompson married! There couldn't be *two* of that name!'"

"I'll bet there isn't!" Ruey said with deep conviction.

"No; well, that's what gave us the clue. We nearly wrote to Joey then and there. Then I pointed out that in a week or two we should be joining you all and it would be as well to wait until we met and tell you the whole yarn. In any case, there couldn't be any mistake, once we'd seen you three. Every last one of you is a Thompson for looks. As for you, Ruey my child, you're the living image of Grannie Rosomon at the same age. Anyhow, Joey said you seemed to have no relations, so we've come to give you quite a few. As a start, there are Laurie and me and our boys. Then there are Grannie and Grandpa who are pets; and a whole pile of cousins of one degree or another."

Ruey remained silent for a moment. Then she looked up. "Is—is *THAT WOMAN* still alive? Because if so, I don't want to meet *her*!"

"Don't worry; you can't. She died six years ago. And, as I told you, both your uncles were killed in the war."

"It seems to me," said Len thoughtfully, "that Mrs. Thompson punished herself by doing what she did. When she was so beastly to her daughter she couldn't have had an idea that she would lose both her sons like that. She must have been ghastly lonely those last years."

"I imagine she was. She wouldn't come to see any of the family, for they'd all told her when she wrote round to tell them that she was quite wrong. They said she ought to forgive Evelyn after a time, anyhow. That finished them with *her*!" Daisy paused and looked at Ruey doubtfully. There was more to tell. Captain Thompson had left most of his money to his wife for her life and it would now come to Ruey and the boys. However, she decided against mentioning it at present. She thought the girl had had all she could take at once.

That she was right was proved to her a minute later. Ruey sat silent at first. Suddenly, she jumped up. "I—I'm going to think this over. Don't come with me, any of you! I want to be alone to take it in—if I *can*!"

She rushed off down the road and Daisy looked after her with pity in her eyes. "I'm very sorry for Ruey. It's all been a shock. Listen to me, you three!" She faced round on the triplets. "Don't mention the thing to her when she comes back, let her have a chance to take it all in. Presently, she'll see that it's all to the good. I mean, she'll know that even if anything happens to her father, she and the boys aren't left absolutely alone in the world. She'll be all right with your mother. I *should* know what Jo's like after all these years! I know that she and your father are their legal guardians, but if the Professor goes off space-touring and never comes back, they'll all like to feel that they have relations of their own as well. Laurie and I want them for Christmas so that they can get to know their father's family—such of it as is get-at-able, anyhow. But, of course, their real home will be with you Maynards." She stood up. "I'm going back to the house now. It's nearly time for Peter's first supper. Don't forget! Not a word out of you unless she mentions it herself first. In that case, you can talk." She left them and went back to the house, leaving the three to discuss the latest news among themselves until Con saw Ruey coming back up the road. Then they changed the subject and when she reached them, they were hard at the question of form netball teams.

She came and stood facing them, a gleam of defiance in her eyes and her chin well up. "I feel better," she said. "I can't talk of it now, but I think I'll be glad about it when I've had time to take it in. I'm asking Roger and Roddy to come for a walk after supper. Don't try to come with us, any of you, and keep Steve from wanting to come. This is *our* business and we've got to settle it among ourselves. But there's one thing I'd like to know. Can any of you tell me if Aunt Joey and Uncle Jack will still be our guardians?"

"Daisy seems to think so," Margot said soberly. "She said Mother and Father were your legal guardians and—and she seemed to think you'd be all right."

"Yes," Len chimed in. "That'll be O.K., Ruey. It was a legal arrangement, made by your own father. It'll be O.K."

"All the same," Con took her turn, "we'd like you to know that though we want you in our family, we're all awfully glad to know that you really have relations of your own as well. We took you in before we knew any of all this and you still belong with us if that's what you want—and that goes for the boys, too."

Ruey went scarlet. "What do you think? It's what I wanted to know and it's what *I* want, whatever the boys may say. Now we'll leave it. There's the bell for supper and we all look *sights*! Come on! We must scam!" And she led the way as hard as she could go.

Chapter XIX

THE WIND-UP

By the time Wednesday of that week came, Ruey and the boys were becoming accustomed to the fact that after all, they did have relations apart from their father. Roddy, to be truthful, took it all in his stride. He was a philosophic youth, taking life very much as it came. Once he really understood the state of affairs, he set it aside and returned to his ordinary ploys.

Roger said little, but he thought the more. Secretly, he felt thankful to know that even if their father persisted in his madness and set off on the first space-flight known to man, there would be other older people with the right to look after the younger ones and help him make decisions. He had felt that when he learned that the Maynards were their legal guardians. It was an even greater relief to have relations as well to turn to in case of need.

As for Ruey, sensitive and highly-strung under all her insouciant ways, she was the one to whom, perhaps, it meant most. She loved Joey and Jack with all the strength of her heart, but she knew that even their goodness was not quite the same as the goodness of her own family could be to her. There was no blood-tie between them and though she could never have explained it to anyone, not even herself, she felt the difference. Ruey was clannish by nature.

"It isn't that I don't love Auntie Joey," she had said to Daisy the day before when they were strolling together by the side of the lake. "I do! She's been a complete angel to the boys and me! But she isn't our *own*! You and Laurie are."

Daisy had laughed. "I can guess how you feel, Ruey. Yes; we *are* your folks. But all the same, Joey will see to you until you're of age if it should be necessary. It need not be, you know. The chances are your dad will find out that space-travel isn't quite as far forward as he thinks and will come back to make a home for you three. But if he does set off on a wild-goose chase—how appropriate, by the way!—you'll never lack a home, either with your guardians or your relations. So you may feel quite safe and secure."

"Oh, I do!" Ruey turned a glowing face up to hers. "I—I've never felt so safe since—since Mummy died. We got along all right, but—well it wasn't the same thing."

"It couldn't be!" Daisy spoke out of her own experience, since she and her sister Primula had been left alone when she herself was a mere child.^[12]

[12] The Chalet School in Exile.

Daisy herself had announced early that day that she and Laurie would be staying on at Die Blumen for another week after the Maynards left.

"I'm not rushing off after just two or three days of the first chance I've had of renewing my acquaintance with the Tiernsee after all these years!" she said firmly. "I want to show Laurie all my pet places—or as many of them as I *can*. Goodness only knows when we'll be able to manage a month's holiday again! Even our honeymoon had to be cut short, you may remember.^[13] Now we're here, we'll spend at least a fortnight in this lovely place. After that, we'll come on to you, Jo. Incidentally, as every one has come down heavily on the idea of Chas going home with you, even in an ambulance, we'll be responsible for him, poor little chap!"

[13] Joey Goes to the Oberland.

Joey's face lit up. "Oh, Daisy, *would* you? I talked myself out to both Matron and the doctors on Sunday, but no one would hear of our taking him and I suppose he *ought* to stay where he is for the present. To know that you and Laurie will be with him—especially as Laurie's a doctor—will make me easy about him."

Laurie bowed his acknowledgments. "Thanks for the bouquet! I know you'd come back for him with a heart and half, but if I'm not mistaken, you'll be up to the eyes then, getting your family off to school. And that reminds me, we want to keep the Three R's with us. You've had 'em most of the holidays, but we've just found 'em. I'd like to get to know them a good deal better than we do at present. What's that?" as Joey murmured something. "School uniform for Ruey? Bless me, woman, can't you measure the kid and get the things that way?"

"Of course she can!" Daisy backed him up. "Now don't argue, Jo! It's settled!"

"Oh, well, have it your own way. I suppose we can manage!" Joey said resignedly.

So that, as Len said, was that.

That was also the day that Anna and Rösli set off for the Görnetz Platz to get Freudesheim ready for its owners' return. A cousin of Anna's and her young daughter were coming in daily to help with the work. The season was nearly over and already one or two of the smaller hotels were closing down for the winter, seeing that there were no winter sports in those parts. Frau Pfeiffau was glad of the extra weeks' work which would mean more money to see them through the winter and she had the prospect of even more, since Madge Russell had written to say that when term began, she and Jem meant to come out for a fortnight or so at the old home and would be glad of help, since Marie and Rosa, her faithful Tirolean helpers, would naturally want to come and spend the time with their own people who lived in Briesau.

Rain came on Tuesday night, so after the small fry had gone to bed, Laurie demanded the Professor's letter and together, the family did their best to make sense of it. They contrived to make out two or three odd sentences more, but even then, the address still remained a mystery. Finally, they had to give it up in despair. But they had learned that Professor Richardson had met a fellow-enthusiast on space-travel that day in Innsbruck, who had told him of a private attempt to send a space-ship off before many months were over. He had offered to take his friend to join them and the Professor had jumped at it. *But* it had meant going at once. Just *where* he had gone, or which country could claim these maniacs for her own, to quote Joey, looked like remaining a deadly secret. However, judging by what Laurie had contrived to decipher, he was in great form and with that, his family had to be content.

And so Wednesday arrived to find them hard at work, packing all the morning. They would be off on the Friday and Joey had announced her intention of getting things done well beforehand and having no wild rush at the last.

"It'll be the first time in your life, then!" Daisy said sceptically. "I never knew you when you didn't have to go tearing round at the last moment!"

Joey chuckled. "Oh, I'm a reformed character, these days. You stop cheeking me and come and help me clear out all this bed-linen. I'm leaving you enough for next week, but Madge may bring her own. Don't forget to fetch mine along with you when you come!"

Ruey and the triplets were set to washing out the small things belonging to the nursery party. Much to the amazement of the Maynards, Ruey proved an excellent ironer, though she had made the boys sleep in rough-dried sheets at the chalet.

"Oh, I can do it," she said. "The thing is I loathe ironing great spreads like sheets. These tiny things are fun."

Roddy, Steve and Mike arrived halfway through the morning with the mail, but though the two doctors grabbed theirs and went off to read it, Joey insisted that no one else might. However, she found time before their midday meal to open *one* of her own letters and skim over it. When she finished, she danced a jig of triumph. As she had retired to her bedroom, no one saw the performance, but her own family eyed her suspiciously when she came down to lunch. There was a certain sparkle in her eyes that they all knew. However, no one said anything and the meal ended and they washed up and cleared away before they found out what it meant.

“Jack,” she said, when she came downstairs from changing, having informed the party at the table that no one was doing any more work that afternoon, “what are you men doing with yourselves this afternoon?”

“Oh, go for a stroll, I expect. Why?”

“Well, will you take all the boys down to Mike with you. I’ve had a letter from Hilda Annersley simply packed with news for the girls—here it is—but it won’t interest Roger and the other laddies. You take them off while the girls and I have a good old natter about coming events.”

He glanced up from the letter which he was reading while listening with one ear to what she had to say. “This certainly *is* news! Yes; we’ll take the boys off. They’d be bored to extinction by this, but our three will be shrieking their heads off with excitement. I suppose Ruey will be keen, too?”

“Certainly she will. She’ll be a Chalet School girl in little more than ten days now. She will be quite thrilled or I don’t know girls!”

“I’ll believe you! O.K. We’ll walk down to Spärtz and have coffee and cakes there, so don’t expect us back before supper. Any shopping to do?”

“No, thank you. I don’t want any more to take home than I must. You’d better take a dekkko at the car while you’re down and make sure she’s filled up. You’re taking Len and Con with you, not to speak of Steve and Mike and you don’t want to be stranded on the road with that crowd.”

“How right you are! I’ll see to it. Sure you and Margot can manage all the rest?”

“Easily! It’s a straight journey to Basle and Frieda is meeting us there.”

“Then that’s all right. Here! Take your letter! They’ll want to hear what Hilda has to say for herself.” He paused. Then he added, “Better get down and make sure that demon Mike isn’t trying to improve on your cooking arrangements!”

Whereat, they both went off into roars of laughter. Mike had behaved in a positively saintly way for him ever since he had rejoined his family; but the day before had seen a lapse on his part. Frau Pfeiffau had left a dish of stewed fruit and another of custard ready for their evening meal. Mike, going to the kitchen for something, had seen them and also the tin of mustard which had been carelessly left on the table. With Mike, to think was to act. He stirred two dessert-spoonfuls of mustard into the custard and supper had ended in a riot, only concluded when Jack, standing over his wicked son, fitted the punishment to the crime and made that young man swallow a whole spoonful of the nauseous mixture as punishment. Mike was scarlet-faced and tearful by the time he got it down and the others removed the bowl and turned out its contents on to the incinerator before attending to the clearing-away.

“Mike will leave everything of that kind alone for months to come after the dose you gave him yesterday,” Joey said at last, mopping her eyes. “Oh, dear! I’m *aching* with laughing!

There's the bell! Come along down or you'll be frightfully late in starting and have to come back before you get there."

Jack chuckled, but followed her from the room, having already promised to say nothing to anyone about the contents of her letter.

"What about a walk down to Spärtz?" he inquired as the meal drew to a close. "Any of you ever walked it? No? Good! Then that's what we'll do. I want to see to the car and make sure she's O.K. for Friday. All you fellows come with Laurie and me and when my business is finished, I'll stand you coffee and cakes before we come back."

"*You fellows*! Aren't *we* to come as well?" Margot demanded.

"No; your mother has something for you girls. We're parting company for the afternoon," her father told her. "Steve, you and Mike go and wash your hands. You, too, Roddy. Someone see that Mike washes his face, too, please. He's blueberry juice from ear to ear!"

Mike was sufficiently influenced still by yesterday's episode. He made no demur but went off with Len who marched him to the bathroom and scrubbed his face clean.

"There!" she said when he had dried himself. "That's better. Let me see your hanky."

Mike pulled from his pocket a filthy rag that looked as if it had been used on the dirtiest parts of the engine of the Lagonda. Len shrieked, confiscated it for the incinerator and saw that he had a clean one.

"And for goodness' sake, try to *keep* it clean!" she scolded; but as she softened her remarks with a small tip for sweets when he reached Spärtz, he accepted it sweetly. Len might play the elder sister at times, but she was always good for something of that kind.

The party set off at last, headed by Laurie and Roger, Jack following with the three younger boys. When they had vanished, Joey proposed going out into the garden where the babies were already established, the twins in their pram and small Cecil in a hammock, and spending the afternoon there.

"Bring that parcel you'll find under the table by my bed, Len," she directed. "You other girls, fetch the chairs; and twins, you bring cushions. We'll sit at the far side of the mulberry tree. The babies are asleep—or if not, they ought to be—and I don't want them rudely wakened by your yells when you hear the news."

"News?" Margot said quickly. "What news?"

"You'll hear as soon as we're settled, so wouldn't it be a good idea to get settled as soon as possible?" Joey asked sweetly.

She went straight out to the babies herself, but they were all fast asleep, having been put out just before Joey had gone up to change. Even Cecil was not considered old enough yet to come to the family meals and at home, the youngsters were kept pretty strictly to quarters. Joey had a horror of sophisticated children and, as a result, saw to it that hers were not too much with the adults.

She bent over the tiny twins, smiling as she made sure the canopy of the pram was secure. Then she bent over Cecil in the standing hammock and moved her gently to the back of it. Cecil slept peacefully, not in the least disturbed by being moved. That done, their mother walked off to the place she had chosen which was near enough for her to hear if the babies cried, and far enough away from them not to be rudely awakened if the girls' excitement moved them to loud cries. In any case, as she meditated, every Maynard baby had learned to sleep through most things by the time it was three months old.

The girls came with the deck-chairs and the twins trotted after, laden with cushions. By the time Len arrived with the big, brown-paper parcel, the encampment was ready and Joey was

already seated, a handful of sheets of writing-paper in her hand, the other held out for the parcel.

“Hand it over!” She laid her letter on the grass beside her and became very busy opening the parcel. A magnificent box of sweets appeared. She handed it around amid murmurs of acclamation from everyone and when they were all busy, laid it down beside her and picked up the letter.

“Is that from Auntie Hilda?” Len demanded, having caught a glimpse of the small, clear writing with which the sheets were covered.

“It is. I’m going to read it to you—parts of it, anyhow. There’s quite a lot of news for you,” Joey said, “including you two, Felix and Felicity.”

Quick-witted Margot was on to it like a knife. “You *don’t* mean to say the school is starting a Kindergarten?” she asked incredulously.

Joey nodded. “Exactly that. Now be quiet and I’ll read you what Auntie Hilda says. Let me see. Where is it?” She riffled through the sheets and presently found what she was seeking. “Here you are. Take another sweet, everyone and then lend me your ears. That means ‘Listen!’ you two!” to the elder twins. Then she began.

“Well, we’ve made our final arrangements and you’ll be glad to hear that we are able to begin our new venture—new for Switzerland, I mean—this term. I know you will be thrilled to hear that our Kindergarten is a thing of the present. You’ve worried us about starting it for long enough, goodness knows!

“I’m very glad we could get the Stephanie after all. Herr Gebhardt hummed and ha’ed over it so long, I was beginning to think we’d have to wait still longer. However last week I had a letter saying he had decided to sell and I signed the papers this morning and it really is ours. Also, it means a home for Herr Laubach. As you may remember it has a small wing which can be shut off and he’s to establish himself there. Only four rooms and a bathroom, but quite large enough for him. He is delighted and so are we. Of course, it’s going to be a case of all hands to the pumps to get it ready in time, but everyone is buckling down to it and I think it will be all right.”

She got no further for a few moments, for the girls were all applauding under their breath and Ruey was asking plaintively, “But who is Herr Laubach?”

“Our old art master,” Con said. “He left at the end of last term, but he wanted to be near us.^[14] He’s been with the school ever since it started and he hasn’t any family. *We* are his family now, poor old pet!”

[14] Trials for the Chalet School.

Whereat Joey collapsed. The said Herr Laubach had been noted for his hair-trigger temper and to hear her second girl calmly call him “poor old pet” was too much for her.

“The Stephanie, Mamma?” Margot said eagerly. “Oh, how lovely! It’s quite close and the twins will be able to go most days, even in the bad weather. It’ll be rather a distance for the Morrisises, though, won’t it? I mean they live at the other end of the Platz.”

“What saint will it be?” Len asked anxiously.

“You’ll hear about that in a moment. Meantime, keep your raptures down and *don’t* wake the babies, whatever you do! Thank goodness, Daisy decided to wheel her pair round the lake to show them off to Herr Braun! They’re not accustomed to noise as ours are.” She turned back to her letter. “Where was I?”

They sat quietly, Margot seizing the opportunity to pass the sweets while Joey found her place. Then she began again.

“We have to think up a new saint for it. Tell the girls and ask what they suggest. It ought to be a child-saint, I think.

“We shall have fifteen to begin with—quite a good number. There are your twins and the three elder Morrisises and Phoebe Peters’ Lucy which gives us six day pupils at least. Then Simone will send her young Pierre with Tessa, and Frieda, who was up here for the weekend says she will send your god-daughter, Carlotta, so that’s two more. Winifred Embury has a friend with two little boys of five and six, and they are sending them along, and I heard from Madge this morning and she says she and Jem are thinking of starting Kevin and Kester with us, too. If they come, that will give us seventeen, for three of the patients at the San are going to send their little girls who have all been up here for the summer holidays, staying with aunts. The poor souls are overjoyed about our newest effort, so Miss Graves tell me. Mercifully, all three are only at the San for convalescent treatment. Two of them, I regret to tell you, are Susan—Susan Holmes and Susan Dickie. The third is a French child, Marguerite Levasseur, but they call her Guita. So we have definitely six girls and seven boys.”

“But she mentions only thirteen,” Ruey observed at this point.

“She does. But she says further on that she forgot to say that the British representative of a big firm of engineers is sending his pair—a boy and a girl. That makes the fifteen sure. If Madge’s young Kevin and Kester come, it *will* be seventeen, with boys well in the majority. I think it’s a good idea myself. As soon as those two are eight, they’ll go to prep school, of course. In the meantime, they’ll be picking up a certain amount of French and German which will be a help to them later. Now let me go on. I’ve still more news for you.” She cleared her throat and began again.

“As for who is to be head, we’re in luck’s way. Who do you think applied? Kathie Robertson from Edinburgh! Do you remember her—a big, jolly girl with an untidy mop of curly brown hair. Her nickname at school was ‘Mops’ and she deserved it. She has it well-groomed these days, I can tell you. I scarcely knew her when she came to my hotel in London for an interview! She will manage alone for the first term. If we grow as I hope we shall, I must see about an assistant for her, but that may wait for the present. Sharlie Andrews”—a junior mistress, Ruey—“will help out when necessary.”

“Finally, we are settled with an art mistress. Do you remember Rosalind Yolland? She left school to go home and help her mother; but the Yollands have had losses and Rosalind must turn out to work. She has always kept up her art and hers was one of the applications sent me by the agents. I closed with her at once. She was an excellent prefect and I remember she helped considerably with the Hobbies Club and could teach well. I’m sure everyone who remembers her will welcome her with open arms: By the way, be sure you warn your three that they are *not* to call these two by their Christian names! It must be Miss Robertson and Miss Yolland.”

“What a yell!” Len said. “I’ll never remember! But I remember both Kathie and Rosalind quite well. They were awfully decent and our crowd liked them awfully.”

“You’ll have to remember,” Joey said severely. “Don’t talk nonsense, Len. You three soon remembered to call Auntie Hilda ‘Miss Annersley’ in school hours.”

“That’s a little different,” Con observed. “She’s Head and somehow she doesn’t let you forget it—in school.”

"I don't suppose those two will let you forget that they're staff now, either. Well, that's about all." She turned to her elder twins who had sat silent. "And what do you think of it all? Rather fun to begin at school so soon, isn't it?"

"I think it'll be nifty," Felix said. "I'm glad there's going to be lots of boys, Mamma. More fun than just doing lessons on our own or with girls."

"What does my Felicity think?" Joey looked down into the big blue eyes.

"Will Len and Con and Margot be there?" Felicity asked.

"Not exactly. They're big girls, my precious. But you'll see them at Prayers and between times and you'll be at home with me and the babies when lessons are done," Joey said tenderly. She had known that Felix would be delighted. He was very like Mike in many ways, and Mike, she knew, had suffered from not being with other boys during his first lessons. But Felicity was a quiet little puss.

"You'll love it Felicity," Len said eagerly. "We'll get plenty of chances of seeing each other between times, and you do know Lucy Peters and Jean Morris already. It isn't as if you were going quite alone among strangers."

Felicity looked at her eldest sister. "You're sure, Len?"

"I'm sure," Len nodded, making up her mind to see as much as she could of her small sister during the first two or three weeks.

Felicity heaved a deep sigh. "Then I 'spect it'll be all right. I like Lucy and Jean."

Joey smiled at her again and folded up the letter. "Well, that's all of that. What's the time? What about a spot of coffee and cakes? I'll come——"

"You can't!" Margot cried as a yell came from the pram. "The babies are waking. You go and help with them, Ruey, and we three will see to the eats. Come on, Len! Wake up, Con! Twins, come and help to carry things while Mamma sees to Geoff and Phil. Then we'll have a game later—anything you like!"

The last of Felicity's troubles vanished. "I'll come!" she said, wriggling to her feet. "Come on, F'lix! time for coffee and cakes!"

And that ended any possibility of trouble with her when school should begin.

"Good-bye, Daisy—good-bye, Laurie! We'll look for you crowd tomorrow week and mind you start off in good time and arrive at a decent hour! Remember, Ruey will have all her uniform to try on and there will be all alterations to make and school opens on the following Tuesday, so it won't leave us much time!"

Thus Joey, leaning out of the open carriage of the rack and pinion train that was taking all the Maynards except Charles down to the valley, the first step of the way home.

"Don't you worry! I know that as well as you," Daisy said, leaving her pram to her husband so that she might stretch up for yet another kiss. "Oh, Joey, it's lovely being here again after all these years. And it's still lovelier being with you and knowing that I'll be seeing you again in a week's time. And don't worry about Chas. We'll look after him all right and he's making enormous headway now. I expect you'll get quite a shock when you do see him again. I know he's grown!"

"Tell me something I *don't* know!" Joey said, leaning out at a perilous angle to bestow the kiss. "When we were up yesterday, Matron said he had outgrown his things badly and I had to dig out Steve's case and find shorts and shirts for him and send them up pronto. Hello! We seem to be about to move off. Stand back, Daisy! I don't want to end my holiday by leaving you as strawberry jam on the railway! Have a good time, Ruey, and come to us prepared to

have an even better at school! Mind you all three send us cards to let us know what you're doing and——”

A wild screech from the engine cut short her instructions and they began to move off. Jack grabbed his wife and sat her back on the seat with more vim than gentleness.

“For Heaven’s sake, girl! You needn’t talk about Daisy! Now keep yourself quiet. Here’s Cecil to anchor you!”

“Wave—wave!” Len shrieked, waving herself with her free hand, the other arm being burdened by Baby Phil. “Good-bye Tiernsee, till next time!”

They all waved frantically until they reached the incline and began to slip down it and the Tiernsee was out of sight. Then they settled down until they should reach Spärtz and, as Con remarked, be *really* on the way home.

“But the Tiernsee is home, too,” Margot said thoughtfully. “It’s our holiday home. Why—*Mamma!*” as she saw her mother dash her hand across her eyes.

“Don’t mind me!” Joey said jerkily. “The Tiernsee has always been very special with all our crowd and I hate saying good-bye to it, even now. I’m all right, you ninnies! Just a little sentiment! Soon over, as you see. Now let’s talk of the coming term and home at the Platz. We’ve plenty to do once we get there. Our summer holiday is ended.”

But late that night when she and Jack were alone in their big bedroom at Freudesheim, and she had come from making her rounds, she turned to him with misty eyes.

“I love *this* place, but the Tiernsee will always be my own *special* place.”

And Jack, with his arm round her, agreed.

[The end of Joey and Co. in Tirol by Elinor Mary Brent-Dyer]